



Aim

To understand how MMO can support and enable fisher to fisher engagement so the industry can more easily organise and represent themselves in the fisheries management system. This knowledge should improve the way the MMO collaborates with fishing communities.

Introduction and methodology

As the MMO and DEFRA adopt a collaborative approach to working with its stakeholders and fishing communities as set out in the Joint Fisheries Statement, there is a stronger understanding needed on the existing structures in the English fishing sector and how to support and enable fisher-to-fisher engagement. The MMO are looking to increase the participatory capacity and move towards improved representation of the inshore sector in fisheries management.

The methodology uses a literature review, interviews and analysis to provide an examination of the challenges. The study incorporates UK and international case studies, analysing the existing organisations facilitating participation and the financial structures needed to support participation. A roadmap of recommendations for fisher-to-fisher engagement is suggested to be carried out with a goal of increasing participation specifically for the Regional Fisheries Groups.

Results

There is a great diversity across the English fishing industry. Engaging and collaborating with industry will improve our results from fisheries management. There are multiple barriers to fisher-to-fisher engagement and therefore participation in fisheries management. Based on interviews conducted with the industry the key factors identified include financial disincentives, a lack of trust, not understanding the process of fisheries management, not seeing knowledge given being used, not knowing what participation results in, power imbalances, overwhelming communication, dominant characters and individual motivations, impacts on earnings and competition and secrecy.

The study recommends nine actions that could be implemented or supported by the MMO to improve engagement between fishers and to build capacity in relation to engagement and participation. Actions include:

1. "How-to" guides for forming and maintaining fisheries associations, or for establishing a fisheries CIC (well progressed through the work of Lyme Bay CIC).
2. Implementing tools to enable anonymous input (noting the need for caution).
3. Fostering constructive participation through upskilling to build participation capacity and confidence.
4. Using specialist facilitators and novel approaches at Regional Fisheries Group meetings.
5. Creating and supporting inshore fisheries spokespersons.
6. Introducing payments for inshore fisheries representatives.
7. Targeted organisation support, including financial support.
8. Enabling blended finance structures to increase financial stability of fishermen's associations, CICs, and similar organisations.
9. Developing an engagement and participation roadmap that orients multiple stakeholders towards a shared vision of better engagement and participation.



A roadmap outline was produced (MMO1389b), which represents a guide for how the MMO could successfully build capacity for fishers to engage and participate in fisheries management and more specifically the RFGs, with routes to financial support and organisational capacity, using the findings and recommendation from the main report, whilst monitoring and evaluating the process along the way.

Conclusions and recommendations

Government bodies should invest in building the capacity and participation of inshore fishing communities, which include: 1. Strengthening civil society organisations and building social capital so inshore fishers are fairly represented in England's fisheries management system. 2. Enabling inshore fishers to organise and for fishers to have confidence that their interests are fairly represented, which will require upskilling, funding, and a coherent multi-stakeholder programme that provides the foundation from which greater equality of representation can be achieved. 3. Investing in the inshore fleet to enable professionalisation through skills development, including of the skills needed to engage, organise, and participate in fisheries management. 4. Providing support and opportunities for fishers to develop the skills to engage, organise and participate. 5. Using MMO's convening power, to consolidate existing efforts to increase fisher-to-fisher engagement and participation in fisheries management, while being sensitive not to override existing efforts. 6. MMO and Defra having the capacity to enable significant progress by clarifying and communicating what engagement and participation can lead to. 7. MMO should invest in a co-designed engagement and participation roadmap (MMO1389b).

MMO comments

The report provides insight and context on the English fishing industry in 2023/2024 and builds on a network analysis methodology (MMO1341). The roadmap provides guidance on delivering a suite of MMO actions to build capacity and participation. The recommendations and strategy in the final report and roadmap are practical and it is hoped that some progress can be made depending on resources, capacity and capability. The MMO is working with capacity building organisations and processes with the aim to improve the situation for fishers.

Further information

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