



Aim

To explore methods that can be used to improve the MMO's understanding of the networks within fishing communities. This will support fair and inclusive collaborative fisheries management and participatory approaches to marine management.

Introduction and methodology

To support engagement, fisheries management, Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) development and delivery and the achievement of our strategic goals, the MMO needs to improve its understanding of its stakeholder networks. Approaches to mapping and engaging with stakeholders can often be restricted to existing relationships and interactions and may miss important groups within communities which can hinder successful collaboration. Participation and co-management are stated parts of the English approach to fisheries management (Fisheries Act 2020 and MMO Goal 4 ([MMO's 2030 strategic plan](#))) and depend on the MMO being able to identify relevant stakeholders and to provide opportunities to participate to those who want to.

The objectives of the study were to a) provide insights on fishing community networks and b) provide recommendations on how to approach stakeholder mapping. The study team carried out a literature review to understand approaches to network analysis and trialled the use of egocentric social network analysis to understand fisheries networks. The egocentric method of network analysis involves approaching an increasing number of individuals connected to a first selected individual, and creating and mapping the network outwards via a snowball sampling effect. This involved interviewing 19 network members, all of which captured information about relationships between network members and other useful qualitative insights.

Results

In this case the snowball sampling did not yield sufficient contacts and therefore further purposive and random sampling was applied. During the interviews it was found that engagement with fishers was most successful when arranged through a trusted intermediary and was conducted face-to-face. The majority of those interviewed did not consider there to be a single fishing community. Various opinions were provided about how to improve representation but in summary, interviewees agreed that increasing local representation is necessary. When asked about what future support would be most beneficial, meaningful participation from all across the industry was flagged multiple times.

Fishers reported multiple barriers to their ability to participate and engage; as their capacity is constrained through working hours, which limits their ability to attend meetings, provide evidence and complete forms. Many fishers felt that participation rarely led to tangible outcomes and providing the right evidence type for evidence calls was problematic as there was the perception that providing information is counterproductive. Without financial compensation, the opportunity to work will take priority and it was noted that the MMO and other agencies have not adapted their own ways of working to accommodate the needs and conditions of fishers, such as their operating hours.



Within the case study area, the interviews pointed to the MMO coastal office and local IFCA having good knowledge about the local actors, as a result of officers directly engaging with the local fisheries. It was noted however that there is no process to capture that information so it could be applied to other MMO activities, such as FMP meetings. There were varied views on the outlook for the local industry such as an aging problem, a lack of benefits for inshore fisheries post the UK's exit from the EU and a noticeable impact on wellbeing of striving to continue in the sector was raised by multiple individuals. There was also consensus on the need for clarity about future opportunities and the need to simplify the management landscape.

Conclusions and recommendations

Future stakeholder mapping should include a wider range of stakeholders and consider the power and market influence on participation. Future activities should consider that there may be no single community, and members may not feel that an organisation they are part of truly represents their interests. Two key factors appeared to be associated with perceptions of positive relationships with regulatory bodies, the frequency of face-to-face interactions with officers and those interactions that are linked to non-enforcement matters. Notably, access to funding and the covid hardship payments were well received and reported to be well administrated.

Representatives and the fishing sector as a whole lacks capacity and resources which the MMO could support financially and through considering the barriers to participation and providing clarity of realistic outcomes and timelines. The MMO should also consider introducing processes to better capture information about local fishing networks and for central office to consider the communication with marine officers, supporting their skills to engage with communities. This report has noted that parts of the fisher community are often fatigued from being engaged in research and consultations, particularly on abstract research where there might not be an observable benefit for the individual.

MMO comments

This project was commissioned in 2022 and some of the learning and recommendations have already been incorporated into MMO work. The MMO recognises the demands on stakeholders to engage and is mindful of the time required by the fisher community to input to consultations and other management processes. The MMO has changed some of its practices to try to improve this and set up regional fisheries groups, meeting fishers in their home ports at more reasonable times and being more available to contact via different media. The MMO try to be considerate of the financial constraints associated with participation in fisheries management forums. The MMO are cognisant of issues raised in the report surrounding representation. This has all influenced more recent engagement with fishers and we recognise there is further that we can do.

Following the key findings and recommendations from this work, two projects were commissioned; MMO1389 and MMO1383 to explore how the MMO can support the capacity of fisher-to-fisher engagement, representation, participation and, the behavioural barriers that fishers face when trying to engage. This project is part of a suite of research projects that the MMO can learn from to consider community, support and engagement with the industry.

Further information

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