



Aim

The vision underpinning the RFGs is for the inshore fishing industry to become part of the decision-making process for fisheries management. The RFGs' intended impacts are to achieve greater participation from inshore fishers in discussions and decisions, and thus a different, participative mode of managing fisheries. These impacts also include the institutionalisation of RFGs and a transformed, positive perception of fisheries management among fishers. This study's aim has been to:

- identify constructive and negative feedback on processes from both the early and current arrangement stages of the development of the RFGs
- assess early and ongoing work with a focus on how it is helping the participatory element of the Joint Fisheries Statement (2022) to be delivered. This includes through commitments beyond the Fisheries Act, and internal commitments set by the RFG team
- develop baseline data

Introduction and methodology

The RFGs have been in place for several years, given the importance of stakeholder engagement for the MMO and historic lack of representation from the inshore fleet and non-sector it is important to evaluate how the groups are functioning and if they are delivering the vision.

The project team developed a Theory of Change in partnership with the MMO to map the RFGs and understand the causal pathways/processes leading to outcomes and impacts. An evaluation framework was developed using targeted research questions to show how the RFGs would be evaluated using only existing data collection processes and sources to reduce the need for additional resources and the potential for increased burden on stakeholders. As a result, there are data gaps and some of these are picked up in the implementation plan, which outlines how future evaluations could be carried out by the MMO or external evaluation teams.

Data was only collected from internal stakeholders, internal documents and resources due to concerns around stakeholder fatigue and other engagement activities around the coast planned for the same time. All findings should be caveated by this, the perspectives of industry have not been included so there may be gaps in the findings.

Results

The baseline assessment identified that the current engagement processes used by the RFGs to support its stakeholders appear to be working effectively. Data suggests that in-person meetings are better received amongst stakeholders across regions, port and coastal visits also appear to be well received by stakeholders and are actively working towards building positive relationships with those in the fishing industry. It was noted however that formal meeting attendance (online and hybrid) is generally low throughout regions and that the RFG Delivery Team are working towards making meetings more attractive to relevant stakeholders. Existing data was not sufficient to assess whether the activities are effectively capturing and engaging with the intended



stakeholders, however it was noted that more work can be conducted across all regions to increase the amount and type of stakeholders involved in the activities. Engagement is less successful where there is a lack of continuous communication, or where quick progress on issues raised is not feasible.

The RFG Delivery Team's feedback suggested that stakeholders appear to be satisfied with RFG activities (although increased participation in RFG activities would be beneficial). Nevertheless, the feedback suggests the RFGs are effectively working toward improving the satisfaction and engagement of stakeholders over the three years.

Conclusions and recommendations

The MMO is still at the early stages of turning the vision underpinning RFGs into a reality. Achieving co-management of fisheries between regulators and the inshore fishing industry calls for several step-changes that will take time to materialise and include:

- Interpersonal and interorganisational culture – between the MMO and inshore fishers need to be established for the vision of co-management to come true.
- Increasing participation and building trust - the vision underpinning the RFGs and the intended impacts refer to the inshore industry's participation in consultations and decision-making. Attendance at RFG events has grown, it varies by location, and anecdotal evidence shows differing levels of participation. The factors influencing attendance are not fully clear but seem related to fishers' capacity and motivation. To achieve the RFGs' goals, the MMO needs to adjust its engagement to suit the fishers' availability and needs. Whilst this there are promising sign of improved relations, fishers remain distrustful of the MMO.
- Demonstrating to inshore fishers how their input is considered and informs fisheries management decisions - it was not possible to verify whether stakeholders recognise being listened to by regulators, although members of the RFG team have reported hearing stakeholders expressing greater satisfaction with the MMO over time.

The project report includes practical guidance on how to implement the evaluation going forward. This implementation plan contains advice on the evaluation processes (including updates to the tools developed in this study), considerations for resourcing, as well as an outline of existing data collecting processes, and how they could be refined to collect missing data for future evaluations. The implementation plan provides recommendations on how to best communicate with stakeholders throughout the evaluation, and advice of cost-effective solutions to disseminate its findings.

MMO comments

The MMO hopes this baseline evaluation can be developed and future evaluations can be carried out to continue to ensure the RFGs are functioning in an effective way to deliver their vision. It should be noted that this evaluation did not include the views and opinions of external stakeholders and that feedback is necessary in the near future.

Further information

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