

“IBEFish”

Stakeholder participation towards ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management

There is an increasingly recognised need for finding a balance in the interactions between the environment and fisheries. Ecosystem impacts of fishing can be severely damaging, and several direct and indirect effects have been detected. Interaction occurs also in the other direction when environmental changes affect fish stocks or when protected species (such as cormorants or seals) cause economic losses to fisheries. In recent years, the need to incorporate environmental requirements into fisheries management – the ecosystem approach in managing living aquatic resources – has been endorsed in many international agreements. The European Union has taken an active approach in promoting this approach.

Reducing the ecosystem effects even when they can be clearly shown is, however, complicated and often costly to fisheries. An extension of the management regime is required for two purposes. First, finding solutions to such a complex management challenge requires the inclusion of many types of expertise. Second, the need to include a greater number of relevant stakeholders increases. Therefore, we see that the key to achieving balanced management lies in a more inclusive and integrated form of research and management, even though organizing stakeholder participation for integrated management approaches is a difficult and complicated task.

The IBEFish project had two major objectives:

- 1) to share the results and theoretical understandings gained in past projects with regard to the ecosystem approach in fisheries management, with a special focus on the role of participation in integrated management of the interaction between environment and fisheries; and
- 2) to make practical recommendations for improving fisheries management towards an ecosystem-based approach especially emphasising the need for an enhanced knowledge-base,

legitimacy and trust-building in the management.

To achieve these objectives, IBEFish made use of a **framework for evaluating participatory decision making, which consisted of four main criteria: Information management, Legitimacy, Social dynamics and Costs**. This was applied to synthesise case studies: past projects were reviewed and a special issue in the journal Marine Policy was produced. Afterwards, in May 2007, the IBEFish project organised a workshop to discuss the project findings and to identify policy-relevant messages that were combined in a policy brief, which is available from the IBEFish web site.

It was concluded that **institutional innovation is required for implementing ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management (EBAFM), and that such innovation can best be achieved by engaging in a delicate process of societal decision-making**. The following important lessons can be drawn regarding this required institutional innovation:

1. With regard to information management

Integrated fisheries management is marked by significant levels of risk, uncertainty and ignorance. Existing knowledge is



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Coordinator

Dr. Riku Varjopuro
Finnish Environment Institute
Research programme for environmental policy
Mechelininkatu 34a, P.O.Box 140
FIN-0025, Helsinki
Finland

Phone: + 358 20 490 123

Fax: + 358 20 490 2190

Email:

riku.varjopuro@ymparisto.fi

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disconnected and in incompatible formats dispersed between scientific disciplines, government administrations and stakeholders.

2. With regard to legitimacy

The legitimacy of participatory fisheries management is subject to its legal compatibility, and to issues of accountability and transparency of rules. If participation within fisheries management is to mean more than legitimising government and its policies, then the devolution of governing powers to participatory arenas is necessary.

3. With regard to social dynamics

Participation in fisheries management and policies often takes place in ill-defined arenas. It is often unclear, to participants and to outsiders, whether policy uptake of the decision advice can be expected. The limited scope for agency of non-governmental participants jeopardizes meaningful collaboration of user groups and (sub)national NGOs. This is opposed to the very idea of EBAFM.

4. With regard to costs of decisions and decision-making

Specification of costs is difficult, as EBAFM comprises concerns for, and coordination among, different uses of the sea, e.g. conservation. Costs of current management regimes are considerable, in theory EBAFM holds the potential to reduce these costs as it combines

management regimes of different marine uses. A stronger focus is also required on the just distribution of incurred costs among stakeholders.

Two more issues, i.e. questions of scale and cross-sector integration, were identified, transcending the four categories of the IBEFish frame. These issues illustrate that European fisheries act in a multi-level system, in a combination of cross-sector and multi-level governance. It is no surprise, therefore, that both authorities competent to regulate, and actors having a stake in these issues, are situated in different sectors and on different levels. This implies that information flows, legitimacy, social dynamics and costs are also spread across sectors and jurisdictions.

The way forward should be marked by attempts to further build up experience in stakeholder participation at, and across, all jurisdictional levels. It is in this practical work and in the empirical research on fisheries governance that know-how will mature and institutional innovation will materialize.