



LOCAL DECISION-MAKING FOR UK FISHING

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OVERVIEW


- There are significant regional variations in the characteristics of fish stocks and fishing communities across the UK.
- National decision-making alone risks being too generalised at the local level.
- A number of existing local governance approaches highlight the advantages that local decision-making efforts can bring, as well as the challenges they face.
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships based on collaboration and clear communication can lead to effective regional management.
- Efficient interplay between national and regional efforts is necessary, across the supply chain and between sectors.
- Effective regional decision-making also depends on having sufficient resources, such as funding and operational capacity.

THE NEED FOR LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

As the UK leaves the Common Fisheries Policy, the way in which UK fisheries are managed is likely to change. In recognition of the significant regional variation in fish stocks and between fishing communities around the UK, it is important to explore the role of local decision-making in influencing fisheries management.

The balance between national and local decision-making is often debated for many different sectors, and fisheries is no exception. Whilst national policy can help to standardise practices, implementation can be ill-fitting at the local level due to the diversity in fishing communities across the UK, particularly within the small-scale fleet. This is due to significant regional variations in fishing fleet composition, target species, gear usage, ecological and socio-economic contexts, and interactions with other marine activities (1) (2).

These variations mean that local authorities can be best placed to work alongside local industry members and stakeholders, to determine the needs of the area and ensure the sustainable management of coastal resources (3).



This briefing summarises the output from the APPG on Fisheries open Parliamentary webinar, 29 September 2020. The meeting brought together a diverse array of stakeholders from across the the UK. This document is a synthesis of the discussions that took place both at the event and online (via #LocalFishingDecisions).

EXISTING LOCAL GOVERNANCE MODELS

A certain degree of fisheries management is currently carried out at a regional level in parts of the UK. In England, for instance, ten Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) manage English fisheries out to six nautical miles, under the oversight of the Marine Management Organisation (4)(5). IFCAs were established in 2011 and act as regional delivery bodies for both fisheries management and marine conservation in dedicated inshore areas, through the implementation of specific byelaws (6). Committees comprise constituent local authorities and other appointed members, with relevant experience and knowledge - such as academics, gear technologists, and industry members (7).

One useful IFCA case study is the North Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NEIFCA). Following an unprecedented increase in vessels targeting the local scallop dredge fishery in 2015, and rising concerns over gear conflict with crab and lobster potters, the NEIFCA undertook significant consultation with local stakeholders, engaging with many fishers to gather evidence. As a result, an emergency byelaw was introduced and a trial dredge management scheme developed, which included both a permit scheme and seasonal closures of the scallop fishery (8).

The consultative and cooperative approach taken by the NEIFCA made good use of fishers' rich local knowledge of the area. In the following years, this 'fishery dependent research' and regional industry participation has become a vital element of the scallop fishery assessments and has informed future management plans (7).

LOCAL DECISION-MAKING IN ACTION

Fisheries management decisions rarely fall under the remit of local councils, but this is changing in some parts of the UK. In March 2020, Plymouth City Council drafted its 'Plan for Sustainable Fishing', in a bid to strengthen its relationship with the local fishing industry, revitalise the industry and make Plymouth an 'epicentre' of fishing. The Council have worked with the local industry to develop the Plan, which includes the regeneration of the city's fish market and fish quay, along with schemes to bring more young people and women into the sector (9).

The Renaissance of East Anglian Fisheries (REAF) is a community-led partnership between three local councils, industry bodies and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). REAF was established in 2018 to develop a long-term strategic plan for the shellfish and demersal inshore fishing industry of East Anglia, and is the UK's first regional fishing strategy (10). In order to ensure that fishing practices are sustainable and benefit the local area, REAF put forward eleven recommendations, including an investment in a regional port and a ban on offshore beam trawling (11). REAF are now working to implement these recommendations by setting up a company limited by guarantee (which would be controlled by members rather than shareholders), and are ensuring that membership is representative of the whole region and seafood supply chain - from 'net to plate' (3).



An example of a wholly bottom-up, industry-led approach to decision-making is the Fishing Quay Project in Eastbourne. In order to secure a place to moor vessels, as well as land, process and store their catch, small-scale fishers in Eastbourne formed the Eastbourne Under 10m Community Interest Company (EU10CIC) in 2013 and began building a proposal for a new fishing quay (12) (13). The New Economics Foundation (NEF) have worked alongside the CIC by securing funding, supporting legal discussions to agree a long-term lease of the quay, and reviewing contractors to build the infrastructure (12). Construction has now begun, and the CIC, with grant support from the South East Local Enterprise Partnerships (SELEP)'s Growing Places Fund (14), are developing plans to involve local businesses and the tourism industry in the project, in order to bring about benefits for the whole community (12).

A further key challenge to local fisheries management is developing more sophisticated coordination between local and national bodies. Fishing industry members have felt that government policies can be poorly coordinated with local authorities' management approaches and local industry practices, and are also often insufficiently communicated to industry (16). There can also be significant variation in the capacity of local councils and other organisations to get involved in fisheries management, with some authorities lacking the requisite resources and time needed (15).

As EMFF funding comes to an end, a number of the regional governance projects mentioned in this brief will be looking to secure future funding from elsewhere. This speaks to the wider need for there to be a variety of accessible, well-managed funding opportunities available for such projects, outside of the EU and central government (16).

The experience of the EU10CIC in Eastbourne also highlighted that funding needs to be flexible rather than fixed, to account for any unexpected or pressing challenges that may arise with community infrastructure projects (12).

It is suggested that as there is no 'one size fits all' answer to fisheries management, there needs to be bespoke evidence-gathering for each fishery, in order to build regionally-specific management strategies that are rooted in local industry contexts (3) (7). Furthermore, it is important for these management strategies to take a whole-industry approach, taking into account the whole seafood supply chain to streamline efforts between sectors (3), as well as engaging the wider community in development projects to build shared, inclusive and sustainable management plans (1).



CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

There are a number of challenges facing local decision-making and governance approaches. Perhaps the most significant of these is funding. There is a need to consider the capacity of fishing communities to access the requisite funding for local development projects. This is especially true for the under-10m fleet, as skippers are often unable to find time, or necessary support to write bids and apply for funds (15).



For local decision-making to be effective and successful, it needs to work within the broader framework of national policy. This requires better communication between local and national organisations, and a more thorough engagement with local needs on behalf of national bodies - for example, by operating regional offices that feed back to central government (3).

There is currently no central platform for sharing knowledge on regional management approaches. Success stories could therefore be collated and made accessible, in order to share best practice, encourage knowledge-sharing across the country and facilitate the scaling-up of innovative regional governance models (17).

SUMMARY

To account for regional variation, fisheries management needs effective decision-making and industry support at the local level. This relies upon a number of factors, such as sufficient evidence-gathering specific to the area, sufficient funding, capacity of local authorities, and involvement of the fisheries sector and wider community. It also relies upon national policy being flexible and able to ensure these regional initiatives can work in synchrony with national efforts.

A number of projects around the UK are facilitating local decision-making through very different approaches, but all centre around the building of collaborative partnerships and paying attention to local social, environmental and economic considerations. The success stories can be used for inspiration by other initiatives so that all fishing communities around the UK coast could develop their own area-specific approaches to ensure fisheries are managed effectively for generations to come.

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