

7.0 Findings and Recommendations

A case study analysis inevitably leads one to conclude that site-specific circumstances are different and that “all politics is local.” But while process managers should remember that there is not one size or shape or type of stakeholder process that fits all MPA discussions, there are also some universal lessons that can be drawn from the events that took place in the six designations examined.

7.1 Setting the stage

7.1.1 History

Finding

Process planners ignore context and history at their peril. History is critically important and the nature of its influence will differ from instance to instance. As a rule of thumb, past history (e.g., with management agencies, other stakeholder groups) will always provide insight into the current situation, as well as guidance on achieving leverage (either from going with or against the grain of past events).

Recommendation

Early planning efforts must include a thorough assessment of past history and its potential effects on stakeholder perceptions and the goals they will agree to, as well as on their willingness to participate in any planning process, and the sorts of process structures and groundrules they will accept.

7.1.2 Motivation and goals

Finding

The immediate motivation or impetus for an MPA designation effort plays a key role in determining explicit goals and objectives.

Recommendation

Process managers must have a grasp of the underlying authority for a designation process, as well as the ability to articulate this authority and use it to frame the process as needed. More importantly, they must seek to ascertain what actions and interests are using authority. In other words, who or what is the driver? Change in resource status? Change in agency policy? Interest group campaign? Statutory deadline? In addition, they must have a vision of the process steps from beginning to end, not just the stakeholder participation stage.

Finding

Different stakeholder groups and individuals will may have divergent and sometimes mutually exclusive goals or desired outcomes for the process, and may have different motivations for participating.

Recommendation

Design and manage MPA processes with the expectation that stakeholder motivation and goals will differ, creating the potential for disagreement and/or conflict.

7.1.3 Process design

Finding

The lesson of the diverse case studies is that each instance has attributes that require the planner to make distinctions and design the process to the circumstances. One process design will not fit

all situations, i.e., one size does not fit all. The amount of planning and structural process complexity varied widely across cases and apparently had little direct relationship to overall success. Rather, a key correlate of success appears to be the extent to which the structure matched the fundamental purpose of the effort.

Recommendation

Processes should incorporate appropriate flexibility and adaptability. Convenors and process managers should look at the full array of decision tools that are available and not feel locked into a complex consensus model or a rigid fishery management model. It may be possible to use some aspects of the more complex collaborative processes within the constraints of fishery management, or to use the faster pace and deadlines of fishery management in a situation with broader goals. It can even be useful to consider moving the process from one venue to another as the nature of the problem shifts or evolves, which could involve adjusting the number and kinds of participants and/or meetings.

7.1.4 Science role

Finding

Any manager who believes a process is driven only by science runs a large risk of being blindsided by the inherent uncertainties and disputes within the science community and by the inevitable human and institutional reactions to perceived patterns of costs and benefits, on a variety of levels. Decisions about how to use science and scientists must be carefully considered. It is essential to avoid stopping with superficial descriptions such as “science-driven process” but instead to push for explicit decisions about the role science and scientists will play.

Recommendation

- Remember that scientists are people, with motivations and biases like other stakeholders
- Do not separate scientists from other stakeholders; if there must be a distinct science advisory group, then provide for broad channels of communication to other stakeholder groups
- Do not have scientists alone make maps, even of seemingly non-controversial features such as topography, oceanography, and habitat types
- Ensure that scientists are selected to match the overall goals (e.g., if rebuilding stocks is a major goal, then include stock assessment scientists)
- Be explicit about the role science will play in the process.

7.2 Process management

7.2.1 Political ecology considerations

Finding

Even processes that have much to do with application of scientific information to resource questions are significantly affected by their political settings and the push and pull of how user groups perceive the potential impacts of the proposed MPA(s). Allocation, socioeconomic concerns and political considerations may take on a dominant importance.

Recommendation

Planners and managers should treat politics as the natural expression of inevitable human and interest group dynamics that reflect stakeholders’ genuine interests and perceptions. They are part of the policy process and need to be recognized, accommodated and planned for. Such interest group dynamics often lead to conflict, which (see below) should be seen as a natural part of such complex processes.

7.2.2 Leadership

Finding

Effective leadership of MPA stakeholder processes is critically important, but its essential elements are hard to define. Participants are clear about when effective leadership has (or has not) been exercised. Further, there is no one locus of leadership sufficient for complex MPA designation processes.

Recommendation

Leadership is needed at the following levels, at a minimum:

- The political level that initiates the process and ensures that adequate resources and institutional support are available,
- The upper levels of involved agencies that ensure consistent commitment and follow through on decisions,
- The process level where facilitation, negotiation, and conflict management skills are crucial, and
- The interest group level, where perceived stature, relationships with constituents, and the effective framing, control, and communication of a core message are important.

7.2.3 Conflict management

Finding

Conflict in resource management decisions is unavoidable, but it does not have to dominate a process or cause it to degenerate into a series of counterproductive, polarizing, and divisive encounters. If managed carefully and strategically, conflict can be transformed into an opportunity to explore new ways of bringing people and communities together for common purposes. Opportunities and tools for managing conflict in a particular situation depend in part on the intersection between the design of the process itself and the local sociology of the stakeholder communities.

Recommendation

Each circumstance is different, but, generally speaking, there are three levels at which value-laden conflicts can be addressed, and this should be done through the use of skilled, experienced facilitators. They can:

- Assist stakeholders to discover and agree on shared principles and interests,
- Help participants reach agreement on processes for relating to each other, making decisions, gathering and releasing information, and managing disagreements, and
- Guide ongoing and fundamental shifts in participants' view of themselves and their values as specific decisions are framed and negotiated.

7.2.4 The role of maps and map making

Finding

It is important to recognize the variety of purposes maps may serve and to make clear and widely communicating decisions about which of these purpose(s) maps are meant to accomplish in any particular instance. The process structure should then be adapted to support that purpose.

Recommendation

Process planners should consider three important aspects to maps – the process by which they are made, the information they contain, and how, when, and by whom they are used. Possible applications include:

- Organizing available information and identifying data gaps
- Stimulating discussion
- Defining proposals and alternatives
- Supporting negotiation processes
- Framing “what-if” scenarios
- Analyzing logistical implications for implementation.

7.2.5 Resources

Finding

Stakeholder participation and process is an expensive, time-consuming, staff intensive undertaking. Attempting to conduct stakeholder processes in conjunction with ongoing programmatic or resource management responsibilities carries significant risk. Further, agency staff may have neither the capacity nor skill sets to conduct complex consensus or conflict resolution processes.

Recommendation

Always ensure that key program staff are formally assigned to manage the process from start to finish, and that they have the experience, stature and core skills needed to understand and influence its evolution, and to successfully flag and negotiate emerging issues with the program leadership. Where possible, use third-party process managers from the outset. If this is not possible with given resources, at a minimum use neutral third-party professional facilitators.

7.3 Decision making

7.3.1 Finding

Decision making occurs at numerous points in the MPA deliberation process, and it is critical that stakeholder participants understand the decision role they play, and what happens to their decisions or recommendations once their process is concluded.

7.3.2 Recommendation

Process planners should know the answers to the following questions, and be able to communicate them as needed to participants. This may need to be done at several points in the process to be sure stakeholders do not lose sight of where they fit in the overall resource management picture, or conceive unrealistic expectations about the outcome of their deliberations.

- If enabling legislation does not spell this out, is the process collaborative, consensus building, or just input for the agency?
- Where does the decision-making authority lie?
- How does the agency decision-making process work if there is already a local process underway?
- What are the timeframes for decision making?
- Is there a clear set of rules and process descriptions?
- Are there ‘triggers’ or milestones set up front?
- How do different groups see the components of the process?
- Where do decisions go, after constituents have been involved?
- How do agencies retain discretion on action if the process does not produce a usable outcome?

7.4 Evaluation

7.4.1 Finding

Despite its importance, MPA designation processes are inconsistent in the extent to which they develop and implement evaluation systems.

7.4.2 Recommendation

Evaluation should focus on both the degree to which an MPA is meeting its stated goals and on the effectiveness of the designation process itself. The clearer the MPA's goals are, the easier it will be to design an adequate monitoring system. Where goals are less clear, a secondary process may be required to establish interim and longer-term monitoring targets or benchmarks. A relatively simple model can be used to structure evaluation systems for both ecological and institutional evaluations.