

Social and economic importance of fisheries discussed at IIFET Conference

The recent International Institute of Fisheries Economics and Trade (IIFET) conference in Aberdeen (*Fishing News*, 4 August) held a special session to discuss the social and economic importance of fisheries, and how this should be taken into account in policy decision-making.

The session was organised and chaired by Suzannah Walmsley, fisheries expert at ABPmer, and benefited from a broad range of viewpoints and contributions from industry, government, and researchers.

Using the Scottish Marine Protected Area (MPA) process as a focal point, Suzannah Walmsley opened the session and gave an overview of the need for social and economic assessment and the kinds of indicators that are used.

The session aimed to explore both industry's concerns with socio-economic assessment, and decision-makers' needs in assessing the impacts of different policies across a range of sectors, of which fisheries is one of many. The presentations and discussions that followed raised a number of interesting points.

Economics should be a friend to the industry

Dale Rodmell, Assistant Chief Executive of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO), highlighted that economic valuation should be a friend to the industry, but often it isn't — there have been many cases where economic information has been used against the industry. Based on economic information, NGOs advocated that the French fleet was not viable in deep-sea fisheries, and economic analysis using different measures compared recreational and commercial bass fisheries to argue for priority for the recreational sector.

Data needs to be fit for purpose

The data available for social and economic valuations often come from compliance reporting datasets (eg VMS, landings), which are

not necessarily ideal for impact assessment purposes. Inshore fleets are often disadvantaged in this, as not all their catches must be reported and they are therefore undervalued in such assessments. In these situations, specific studies may be needed to complement existing datasets.

Aggregation of data hides local details

An issue that came up several times was that the aggregation of data — providing high-level information at the level of the fleet — can be useful but it can hide local-level impacts. Bertie Armstrong, Chief Executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF), highlighted that evidence used must be at the correct resolution, and impacts should be considered in relation to their importance at the local — not national — scale.

As management proposals change, impact assessments need to change

Bertie Armstrong highlighted that the Scottish MPA process was sound, but that it went wrong and that we need to learn from past mistakes. For certain sites, the management measures that were put forward were very different from what had been consulted on with the industry, and, he argued, would have a huge impact on those affected. Stephen Mangi, CEFAS, gave an example of a proposed EU deep-sea fishing regulation that would have had a significant impact on the UK fleet, but the economic assessment was able to identify alternative options to minimise the impact. As the proposed regulation changed, the impacts would also change, and the assessment should be updated.

Don't compare apples with pears

There are many different indicators and approaches that can be used for economic valuation of different industry sectors, such as the value of landings, gross value added (GVA), net profit margin, jobs and total economic value (TEV). Shannon Anderson from eftec highlighted that any assessment involves a judgement of which impacts matter most, but when comparing costs and benefits between different sectors, it is important to compare like with like.

Fisheries need earlier consideration in the marine planning process

The process for selecting Marine Conservation Zones in England included guidelines on biological features and ecological representativeness for the network, but there was no guidance on socio-economic aspects. Industry highlighted concerns that information on the importance of areas to fishing is often included relatively late in the process, after

the momentum behind a particular plan or proposal has already been generated. There are a number of spatial tools that can be used to help determine areas of relatively higher importance to fisheries, and these could be included in marine plans to help safeguard areas for fishing.

Taking into account future activity

Impact assessments are based on past activity and landings value, but fishing is inherently variable, and fishermen change their behaviour. Dale Rodmell noted that other sectors (eg aggregate extraction, renewable energy) have specific areas for their future development indicated in marine plans, but future use by fishermen is discounted because assessments are based on past use patterns. In the case of MPAs, impact assessments consider the environmental benefits of protection within the MPA, but not the additional potential environmental impacts outside the MPA from displacement of fishing to other areas, because of the uncertainty in what and where these impacts might be.

An adaptive approach to monitoring and implementation

Cornelius Chikwama, Senior Economist and Head of the Marine Analytical Unit of Marine Scotland, recognised that there were limitations in the information on the spatial distribution of activity on a finer scale, and on how impacts may change over time. He outlined the monitoring and adaptive approach that Marine Scotland is developing in response to these uncertainties, in which it will use data to monitor socio-economic impacts on the industry and to identify any need to intervene (eg based on changes in marine resource use patterns,

competition between resource users, impacts on communities). There will always, however, be difficulties in attributing changes to the MPAs.

Fisheries have value beyond the fish landed

Throughout the discussion, it was clear that fisheries provide more than just the numbers generated by economic impact assessments or total economic value. Economic valuations can only provide a proxy of value — fishing is often a livelihood choice and a way of life with benefits that extend throughout the wider community, and economic impacts reflect only part of the benefit of fishing to society. There are other social and cultural aspects that people value, such as having a supply of local fresh fish (that we should do more to promote), 'living' fishing ports which attract visitors, and the cultural importance attached to those areas.

Taking a wellbeing perspective, Robert Arthur from MRAG sought to highlight the ways these relational and subjective aspects tend to get overlooked or avoided when economic analyses focus on aggregate material benefits. The non-material dimensions highlight the role that individual and collective values play in determining what matters most to different groups. As the presentations and discussions had emphasised, policy processes are often contested. When debates are limited to comparisons of economic value and 'trade-offs', the risk is that these other dimensions of wellbeing are downplayed, and the benefits of fishing are acknowledged but ultimately discounted. The key challenge is to find inclusive 'people-centred' ways for different voices, and the wider values that they represent, to inform and influence



Suzannah Walmsley.

policy decision-making.

Concluding thoughts

As session chair, Suzannah Walmsley shared her concluding thoughts on the discussions:

- data need to be appropriate for the assessment and at the correct spatial resolution, and specific studies may be necessary to collect these data, but there are many aspects that are uncertain and are difficult to quantify
- the significance of impacts should be considered in relation to the local area and fleet
- the dynamic nature of fisheries should be considered, and potential future changes taken into account, including the impact of displacement
- fisheries have wider cultural and social values that can be difficult to capture in economic impact assessments
- any assessment involves value judgements about what matters most, and — just as out at sea — it is important to use the right tool for the job

Suzannah Walmsley is now preparing a White Paper on social and economic assessment in fisheries that will be available later in the year. For more information see abpmer.co.uk/markets/fisheries-and-aquaculture

Coastal PO gets EMFF funding

The UK government has offered the Coastal PO significant development funding through the European Maritime & Fisheries Fund (EMFF), reports **Tim Oliver**.

The PO is already investing the money in getting ready to trade as a recognised PO in January 2017, though a Coastal PO spokesman said there is 'much to be done' before then.

He said that dates for a national series of member consultation meetings have been agreed, venues are being booked, and invitations to the PO's 243 fish producer members will be going out soon. While the consultation takes place, the PO is also investing in the necessary infrastructure for the UK's first small-scale PO set up specifically to benefit coastal fishermen.

As a member of the largest agricultural purchasing group in the UK, with a buying power in excess of £250m, the Coastal PO has gained access for its members to significant economies of scale, expertise and resources.

These resources and the funds from the EMFF are now being aligned to help the Coastal PO achieve its stated objective of 'more money, for more fishermen, from more fish in the sea, forever'.

The Coastal PO spokesman said the PO's objective fits very well with the UK's EMFF required action plan for the development of the UK's small-scale coastal fleet.

He said: "With the PO Board made up of working fishermen and fisheries experts, no one understands the situation that

the under-10 fleet finds itself in, through no fault of its own, more than these men.

"The original aim of the PO — and one that we still focus on — is to give under-10s genuine control of their own destiny and the clout, resources and ability to change things for the better. The consultation meetings are the chance for members to design and implement their preferred structure for the organisation that will ensure that it is fully, and genuinely accountable to its members.

"The alternative to the Coastal PO is simple — a continuing decline through being content to leave it to others to influence the decisions that make the difference between financial survival, or otherwise, for the under-10 fleet".



Bertie Armstrong.