

Integrating Effective Fisheries Consultation in Marine Spatial Management

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One of the greatest challenges in marine spatial planning is siting and implementing projects in a way that is compatible with preexisting fisheries uses. In the United States, this difficulty is compounded by the fact that multiple management bodies have regulatory authority for spatial planning, often with conflicting laws, policies, and goals. Regional Planning Bodies are in the process of developing regional ocean plans, but those plans are not likely to resolve individual project siting and operation conflicts. Instead, both existing and would-be users are forced to navigate through an increasingly complex regulatory environment that involve states and half a dozen federal agencies. Fishery participants, though legally protected through various laws, must respond piecemeal to individual project proposals, which is impossible to do at an individual vessel level, as the number of proposed projects is too large to monitor. On the other side, the responsibility for identifying conflicts early in the planning process is increasingly falling on would-be project developers, for whom discovering conflicts late in the permitting process leads to uncertainty over project approval, a riskier investment climate, and substantial cost escalation during project development. Marine spatial planning efforts will only be successful when those efforts combine interagency agreements on best practices and consultation with individual fisheries. The authors have extensive experience engaging in marine spatial planning efforts in the United States on behalf of fishing interests, and will draw on this experience to present lessons learned regarding effective stakeholder engagement.

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