

Network session report

Stakeholder involvement and social aspects of climate change adaptation in fisheries and aquaculture

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*With contributions from Mike Elliot in the preparation of the session. Unfortunately, Mike Elliot was not able to attend the session, so Mariola Norte stepped in as co-convenor.

The purpose of this network session was to engage participants in discussions about the role of stakeholders in climate change adaptation. The focus of these discussions was on three main aspects of stakeholder engagement:

1. stakeholder perceptions and understanding;
2. ways to engage stakeholders; and
3. methods to facilitate stakeholder interactions.

To allow the participants to share their experiences and discuss in an interactive manner, participants were divided into three groups with approximately 15–20 participants each. Each group focused on one of the three discussion points mentioned above. During the group work, each group would first have an open discussion on each of the topics. Then, participants would try to summarize and capture their discussions using the “rich picture” methodology. The “rich picture” visualization technique uses participant-based real-time drawings and diagrams to capture a group discussion. It is a means to collect information about a complex problem or situation, and provides a space for participants to develop a shared understanding. As such, “rich picture” is a creative way to facilitate visual understanding of complex issues.

Approximately 60 participants joined the network session.

Main outcomes of the discussions and “rich pictures”

Group 1: Stakeholder perceptions and understanding

It is important that both sides, stakeholders and scientists, speak the same language in order to create a common understanding.

Sometimes it can be difficult to find the sweet spot between science and industry, and to balance the economic interests with the scientific objectives. Stakeholders often prioritize short-term objectives, for example, while science prefers to think long-term. This is important to keep in mind when trying to find consensus and set common objectives.

In climate change adaptation it is important to communicate what is considered a threat, and what aspects or changes could be considered an opportunity. Both might require adaptation, so that threats can be reduced and opportunities taken advantage of. Threats and opportunities often differ between sectors, however, which is important when communicating those to stakeholders.



Figure 1 The rich picture developed by Group 1 on the topic of “Stakeholder perceptions and understanding”.

Group 2: Ways to engage stakeholders

Getting stakeholders engaged requires a lot of time to be spent on building trust and relationships. It is also important to *listen* to each other (see the symbolic big ears in the Figure 2). The additional time requirement for these activities is not to be underestimated, as illustrated by the clock.

Stakeholder engagement should not only benefit the science, but also the stakeholders. Scientists, therefore, need to communicate to the stakeholders “what is in it for them”. In the context of climate adaptation, stakeholders often have an economic interest. In such cases it can be beneficial to explain how adaptation may support their economic interests, while empowering them to join decision making processes.

It can be useful to frame the key problem (see the frame in Figure 2), and wrap the main message into a story that highlights what is important to the stakeholders. This can get them motivated and engaged, as illustrated by the book.

When communicating climate change and climate change adaptation, not all stakeholders may have the same understanding, issues, and objectives; as stakeholder work progresses, a re-framing of the story or project may be necessary as new issues and knowledge emerge (see the red frame).

Conflicts may arise during stakeholder engagement (see lightning), e.g. between different stakeholder groups. Listening is key in this instance, and solving such conflicts requires careful communication.

Stakeholder engagement also requires transparency from all parties involved, so that all participants understand each other and the limitations of the process.

To allow for continuous evaluation and improvement of the stakeholder engagement process, a feedback mechanism should be put in place (see spiral), e.g. through questionnaires.



Figure 2 The “rich picture” developed by Group 2 on the topic of “Ways to engage stakeholders”.

Group 3: Methods to facilitate stakeholder interactions

Stakeholders should be engaged from the very beginning of a project (also known as “Stage 0”). The engagement should be active and allow for collaboration, co-creation, and empowerment.

It is important to note that stakeholders resemble a diverse group of sectors and individuals. There was some disagreement on whether industry stakeholders should be included, because they may have their own agendas. It was noted, however, that everyone has an agenda (including science). This is why we need to develop a framework for working together, with “house rules” to keep everything civil and on track, such as the ICES code of conduct for engaging with stakeholders.

Transparency is key in the engagement process, and it should start from a blank slate where the issues are identified through dialogue and communication - rather than presenting what the scientists believe the issues to be. The funding available needs to allow for this type of scoping and interaction.

Scientists need to be willing and able to understand the emotions at stake for engagement to be effective, and be ready to interact with stakeholders. They should recognize that involving stakeholders may require other skill sets beyond scientific analysis.

When inviting stakeholders, one should ask “who are you inviting, and why?”. There are many people in the stakeholder groups with different interests. All users should be engaged and not just a single sector; stakeholder selection should still be context sensitive. One should decide when and where to engage stakeholders that are either directly involved (with climate adaptation), or are representatives of those involved. Different engagement methods may be necessary to engage with the different stakeholder groups.

Overall it is important to build partnerships between scientists and stakeholders, and not have a situation where the stakeholder is always serving science.



Figure 3 The rich picture developed by Group 3 on the topic “Methods to facilitate stakeholder interactions”.

Conclusion

In this session, we were able to demonstrate the intuitive and “no-cost” method of Rich Pictures and how to use old-fashioned drawings as a good communication method. Session participants also really reflected and pondered over good practices of stakeholder engagement. This will be very important for the ICES community, as social and economic indicator development in the ICES Working Group on Social Indicators (WGSOCIAL) and the Working Group on Economics (WGECON) will likely affect more and more stakeholders in ICES science advice.