FRDC
FISHERIES RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Engagement Strategy Foundations for Australia's Wild-Harvest Professional Fishing Industry

Let's Talk Fish
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Contents

Preface 3
Introduction 4
Effective stakeholder engagement 5
Why 'engage'? 5
Principles of good engagement 5
Good engagement is planned 6
Eight Foundations to Help Build an Engagement Strategy for the WHPFI 7
Appendix 1. Good engagement is based on a reflective planning cycle 13
Appendix 2. The different purposes, promises and approaches of engagement 14
Appendix 3. How do environmental values differ? 15
Appendix 4. Scanning check list for identifying potential social acceptability issues 16
References 17

Preface

At the Seafood Directions 2013 Conference, a number of participants in the Let's Talk Fish Project workshop believed that one of the many things that the wild-catch commercial fishing industry could do to improve its social acceptability was to utilise more positive language to describe itself. For instance, the term 'wild-catch' could be replaced by 'wild harvest' to signal that fishing is undertaken in a controlled and managed setting. In addition, it was thought that 'commercial' conjured images of a profit imperative, and should be replaced by 'professional', which might point to the considerable skills involved in 'harvesting' fish sustainably. The participants coined the term Wild Harvest Professional Fishing Industry (WHPFI). This document uses this term instead of wild-catch commercial fishing industry, which has been used throughout the Let's Talk Fish Project Report.

Introduction

The wild-harvest professional fishing industry (the WHPFI) operates in a challenging environment that is characterized by diverse activities, species, locations, global economic trends, and the complex and competing interests of diverse stakeholders interested in the management and/or conservation of common property aquatic natural resources (FRDC 2010:1; Ridge Partners 2010:10). Ultimately the industry's 'sustainability' depends on what is ecologically possible and the extent to which it generates benefits in excess of costs and is consistent with prevailing social customs and norms – social acceptability (Firey 1960 as cited in Shindler et al 2004).

Recent FRDC-commissioned and other social research suggest there are problems with the fishing industry's social acceptability. These data indicate that sections of the Australian public and key decision-makers and interest groups believe the Australian commercial fishing industry falls short of being 'sustainable' (Aslin & Byron 2003; Mazur & Curtis 2006, 2008; Brooks 2009; Sparks 2011).

The results of the Let's Talk Fish (LTF) Project extend previous research findings. The Project has also revealed high levels of public approval of the WHPFI, which is conditional on the sector demonstrating its trustworthiness through environmental stewardship: moving beyond merely complying with regulations to applying best-practice environmental management and continually seeking improvements. The LTF Project also found that the WHPFI needs to recognise that – in addition to being shaped by a range of complex and interacting factors - resource access decisions are more directly shaped by the values, beliefs, and interests of key interest groups and decision makers than by the general public.

This document draws on contemporary social theory, best-practice community and stakeholder engagement, and the Let's Talk Fish Project findings to describe eight foundations for engagement, which the WHPFI (and fisheries decision makers) can draw on to improve its social acceptability. Before we identify those foundations, it is important to explain some key concepts of stakeholder/community engagement.

Effective stakeholder engagement

Why 'engage'?

Since the 1970s, it has been widely recognised that many natural resource challenges are complex, uncertain, occur at multiple scales and have multiple effects on people. Complicating these matters further are the situations involving common-pool resources, where numerous interests compete for development and use of those assets. Controversy is common in these settings, not least of all because people's different and conflicting values and beliefs are not well-recognised or incorporated into decisions. Instead, too much time is taken trying to prove who has the 'facts' and conflict often escalates[1]. Government or industry policies and practices lacking societal acceptance and approval will ultimately fail, even if they are profitable and supported by 'sound' science (Shindler et al 2004).

It is widely accepted that improved understanding of stakeholder attitudes can underpin more strategic and effective stakeholder engagement and efforts to improve social acceptability. Involving people in decisions about how natural resources will be used has had numerous practical and normative benefits (see Box 1).

Box 1. Major benefits of effective engagement

- Improving the relevance and practicality of fisheries policies
- Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery
- Increasing the quality of relationships & trust among stakeholders
- Helping to identify policy or program areas in need of improved performance
- Being more proactive in identifying emerging issues
- Providing opportunities for diverse views to be heard
- Improving stakeholders' sense of ownership of/responsibility for problems as well as for identified solutions
- Building a stronger sense of empowerment and belonging among all stakeholders

Stakeholder or community engagement does require particular skills and various resources. It can also be complex and present varying levels of risk, which should be carefully managed. Some common risks include stakeholders:

- Having conflicting understanding of the purpose of engagement and different expectations regarding its outcomes;
- Feeling excluded from the process (e.g. not able to travel to participate, not feeling heard); and/or
- Having insufficient time to fully contribute or raise concerns due to short timeframes.

Principles of good engagement

Not all engagement or consultation is created equally. Simply having an engagement strategy does not guarantee it is appropriate or effective. Effective engagement practices are founded on established best practice principles (see Table 1). The WHPFI (and decision makers) should consider

[1] It is worth noting that not all conflict is necessarily bad. Constructive conflict increases involvement of participants, builds cohesiveness of a group, enables people to change and grow, and results in solutions that people can live with. Dysfunctional (destructive) conflict is when groups are polarised, morale is damaged, energy is diverted from more useful activities, and no decision is reached.

these principles if and when it seeks to develop a more detailed stakeholder engagement strategy and plans.

While the interpretations of these best practice principles can vary, there are some strong points of consensus. 'Good' engagement should reach out to more than the 'usual suspects' – to a wide range of stakeholders; information is shared openly and readily; people are involved in meaningful and reciprocal interactions; and considerable efforts are made to satisfy multiple interests. Differences of opinion remain about how strongly to prioritise science and information; how much leadership and direction the process needs; what is the proper behaviour of participants; and how to tackle issues of power and trust.

Table 1. Best practice engagement principles

Effective engagement processes are ...	What does that look like in practice?
... clearly scoped	• Internal and external stakeholders know what the engagement process is and what it is not. The issues are framed so that solutions are more readily found. • Internal stakeholders carefully plan what input is sought from others and how it will inform decision making, and how that input will be gathered & analysed.
... transparent	• Internal stakeholders ensure that others know what is happening and how their input is being used.
... connected to decision-making	• Input sought is gathered, analysed effectively, and used to inform decisions about processes and issues under consideration.
... inclusive	• All those with an interest or who might be affected have a genuine opportunity to participate.
... informative	• People have access to the information they need to participate meaningfully
... timely	• Opportunities are provided early in the decision making process for people to generate ideas and express their interests – not simply invite their feedback on predetermined solutions.
... involve deliberation	• There is time for internal and external stakeholders to think things through and weigh up alternatives.
... influential	• People feel it is worth the effort to participate because there is evidence that the process influences the outcomes.
... provide feedback	• People are told how their contribution has made a difference.
... builds trust	• Building trust is a goal in all interactions, which builds confidence in the way decisions are made.

Source: Adapted from IAP2 2001 www.iap2.org

Good engagement is planned

Any further development of wild-catch commercial fishing industry (or government) engagement strategies will require careful and collaborative planning. There are recommended steps for planning and implementing best practice engagement strategies (see Appendix 1), which are similar to the adaptive management cycle of 'plan, do, check, act'. Whilst initially this can be time consuming, it is fundamentally important to achieving success. One of the most important advantages of planning is that it encourages people to be clear about ***why they are engaging*** and ***what they are engaging about.*** Once this is done then appropriate decisions can be made about how to involve people and

be clear with them about level of involvement they can expect to have, why, and what that involvement entails[2] (see Appendix 2).

Eight Foundations to Help Build an Engagement Strategy for the WHPFI

As stated earlier, this document provides some foundations for how the WHPFI (and other stakeholders like fisheries decision makers) might better engage with society and thereby improve its level of social acceptability. It has eight key premises, which are listed below.

1. Move beyond communication to engagement

The LTF Project showed that while there is conditional public approval of the WHPFI, there are also low levels of trust and doubts about the industry's trustworthiness. Therefore, improving social acceptability will require something more than 'business as usual'. It is important for members of the WHPFI and others to increase their awareness and understanding of the difference between an engagement strategy and a communications strategy. Communication strategies are helpful ways for groups and organisations to plan how they will disseminate information ***to*** particular audiences. Such approaches are most effective when people are interested in and/or feel that they need the information[3]. They work less well in increasingly common complex situations where public trust is low and even the 'experts' disagree on what is 'the truth'.

Engagement strategies have slightly different (albeit complimentary) objectives and therefore use different methods and tools[4]. 'Engagement' is one of numerous terms[5] typically used to refer to the practice of ***involving interested parties in decision-making***. That decision making can be formal, informal, apply to a range of issues at different times and across different scales. For example, they might include a formal regulatory response to resource sharing conflict - such as declaring recreational fishing havens. Or a less formal collaborative approach such as a code of conduct to guide commercial access to baitfish species on shared bait grounds during game fishing tournaments.

Engagement is also about building reciprocal and trusting relationships with others. The WHPFI needs to build relationships with its stakeholders that are focused on:

- Two-way (or more) communication processes focused on mutual learning (not who is 'right' or who is 'wrong');
- Active listening and understanding people's values, interests, needs, and situations;
- Respect for people similarities and differences; and
- Valuing people's input.

[2] Ideally, where circumstances (time, resources) allow – those doing the 'engaging' would negotiate with participants to identify appropriate levels of involvement, based on their respective capacities.
[3] However, it is not simply a matter of interest. A person's interests will be determined by their personal values and beliefs, which then lead them to seek out and deem credible certain information. Provided with the same information ('facts' or 'evidence') people holding different values may reach very different conclusions about what should be done to resolve environmental (and fisheries management) issues (Harding 1998)
[4] An engagement strategy may include a communications strategy as a tool for how information might be framed and disseminated to stakeholders and/or the community.
[5] Other commonly used terms include 'public participation', 'community engagement', 'community consultation', 'stakeholder engagement', or 'stakeholder consultation'.

2. Formulate positive vision(s) for the future

There is no doubt that the wild-harvest professional fishing industry faces considerable challenges and works very hard to solve problems. However, if we expend the lion's share of our energy on problem-solving it can lead to excessive negativity, which in turn can lower morale. It may be time for the WHPFI to begin articulating and actively pursuing some positive visions for the long term future. Envisioning such goals and striving to reach them can help the sector to foster more positive (internal and external) relationships and build on the sector's strengths.

Those visions do need to match the general public's aspirations for a sustainable fishery that is based on best-practice environmental stewardship. Visions, goals, objectives, and practices that are seen to contradict environmental stewardship will create and sustain a 'disconnect' with predominant public and stakeholder values. For example, the Industry might consider the following visions for the industry overall and for improved social acceptability, respectively:

Healthy marine ecosystems, stable fish stocks, viable fishing communities

Widespread (stakeholder & public) trust in Australia's wild-harvest professional fishing industry

3. Prioritise building relationships with stakeholders over expensive public information wars

There are various ways to think about the people who might be interested and/or involved in fisheries management decisions and who ought to be 'engaged'[6]. The WHPFI could consider using a broad definition of 'stakeholder' to refer to:

> *any agency, organisation, group or individual who has a direct or indirect interest in fisheries management policies, programs, or projects, or who affects or is affected by the implementation and outcome of those initiatives.*

This is not to suggest that the WHPFI can or should engage with everyone at once and in the same way. The general public in particular is a large and diffuse target, which is difficult and expensive to reach. It is our recommendation that the WHPFI focus most on building more trusting relationships with those organisations, groups and individuals who have had and may continue to influence resource access decision-making processes and outcomes[7]. And special attention should be paid to include people from interest groups (conservation groups, recreational fishing groups) and decision makers who have different and sometimes conflicting opinions from members of the WHPFI (see Figure 1).

[6] Terms such as 'the public', 'the community', 'stakeholders' are commonly heard in NRM and other public policy areas. 'The public' or 'the community' are catch-all phrases used to describe those with an interest in a decision *other than* a proponent or responsible authority. The term 'stakeholder' can mean those with a (often financial or direct) stake or interest in an issue, such as government agencies, industry, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) (Aslin & Brown 2002).
[7] Several FRDC funded research projects have been making similar recommendations (e.g. FRDC Report No. 2008/316).

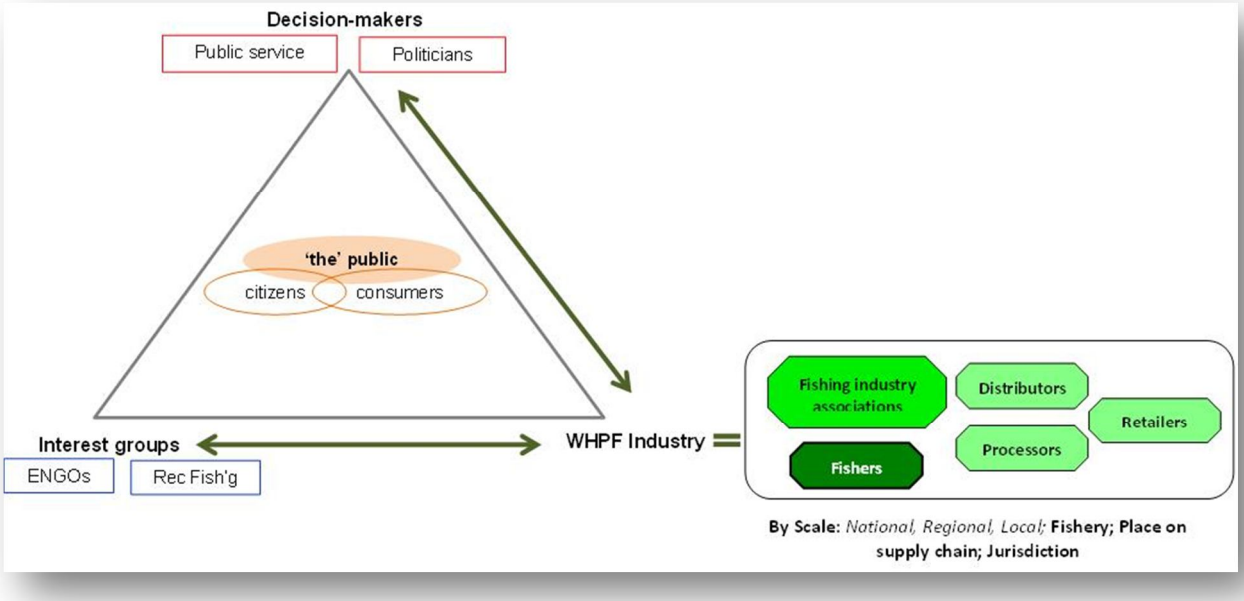


Figure 1. WHPFI relationship building – focus on those with influence

Building productive relationships requires time and consistency. The WHPFI could consider some kind of arrangements for regular engagement with decision makers and interest groups. These interactions would not necessarily always focus on contentious issues, but could also be designed to demonstrate the Industry's willingness to be transparent and continually improve its environmental performance by:

- Seeking feedback from stakeholders on how they see the WHPFI progressing and where improvements can be made;
- Proactively providing stakeholders information about industry initiatives and seeking feedback;
- Attending conferences and seminars and other networking opportunities run by ENGO's or other stakeholders on issues of mutual interest such as ocean health; and
- Actively collaborating - including initiating collaboration - with community groups, ENGOs and others on issues of shared interest.

The WHPFI could also make arrangements for when issues erupt into significant public controversy, such as the "supertrawler". There has been extensive conversation about what 'went wrong' during that time, not the least of which was a perceived lack of a cohesive industry response. Some kind of crisis management team that has representatives from a range of fisheries and other stakeholder groups might help to position the industry more favourably and ensure it is 'in the loop'.

4. Selectively communicate with the public

Communications with the public may be less about building direct relationships than about having a selection of key messages to deliver where finite resources permit and where there is likely to be public interest. These messages should be those that aim to improve public assessments of the trustworthiness of the WHPFI – that is, the Industry has the ability and motivation to act in the public (not just private) interest by being good environmental stewards and that it shares (at least

some of) its environmental values and beliefs (see Appendix 3 for an explanation of environmental values). Improved trust and judgements of trustworthiness are strongly linked to higher levels of social acceptability. Moreover, over time, improved trust will provide a better 'buffer' for the industry when unexpected controversy arises.

The LTF Project's findings from the public mail survey identified a range of public concerns about the WHPFI's environmental performance. A number of key messages are shown in Box 2, which draws on those data.

Box 2. Key messages for communications with the public about the WHPFI

- The Industry has a long term commitment to the sustainability of fish stocks
- The Industry is motivated to 'move beyond compliance' with environmental regulations
- The Industry readily adopts and helps continue to refine and develop methods to reduce by-catch
- The Industry readily adopts best-practice to ensure fresh, healthy seafood for Australian consumers
- The Industry is taking steps to correct inappropriate behavior by some fishers

The Industry does need to be prepared to use social media to communicate with the public; however that use should be more focused on:

- Regular scanning for issues of current and potential concern to members of the public. That scanning should be based on a systematic investigation of key stakeholder interests, assessment of potential impacts and degree of controversy, and levels of concern (see Appendix 1 (Step 1) and Appendix 4);
- Challenging misinformation[8]; but also – and perhaps more importantly
- Providing stories about their environmental stewardship, and where possible using credible figures to tell those stories[9].

Another way to improve public communication is to regularly assess the Industry's level of social acceptability. The FRDC already invests in substantive research and regular opinion polls. However, that investment may be slightly restructured and re-focused to do the following:

- In-depth investigation of industry acceptability on a 5 year cycle; and
- More frequent opinion polling that focuses on key issues generated by the in-depth research and investigates the strength of those opinions, the nature of the concern, and what people think ought to be done

5. Improve understanding and manage expectations of the policy process

The LTF Project demonstrated that a range of factors interact in complicated ways, including the WHPFI's level of acceptability, to influence how resource access decisions are made and what outcomes they will have. It is important to improve awareness and understanding among members

[8] This will need to be done with considerable thought about 1) the goal of doing so, and 2) whatever response is chosen be predicated on principles of best-practice risk communication (e.g. Sandman 2012).
[9] E.g. FRDC Project No. 2011/503

of the WHPFI about governments' fisheries policy and management processes. There are potentially various points of (formal and informal) influence in the policy cycle where fishing industry leaders could be better prepared to negotiate with decision makers and interest groups for desired outcomes.

6. Engage internally to help people move on.

There appears to be considerable anger, grief, and despair among some members of the WHPFI over some of the negative impacts from fisheries regulation reforms and public controversies over fishing industry access to wild fish stocks, including resource sharing decisions. This situation has serious implications for the well-being of those people, as well as for the WHPFI as a whole. If these states of mind are being experienced widely across the Industry, they are likely to inhibit achievement of individual, association, and industry-scale goals. It is important to sincerely acknowledge people's feelings in order to then support them to help find a way to 'move on'. The WHPFI may need to consult with rural health experts to implement an industry-wide system implemented at regional and local scales to help people to heal.

7. Continue to build capacity for engagement and seek professional assistance

There have been various initiatives, including recent FRDC research[10], to help build the capacity of the fishing industry to better communicate with its various stakeholders. The WHPFI should continue to invest in those and other initiatives. However, it is challenging for any organisation seeking to engage its stakeholders and the wider community to identify the necessary processes and tools that are appropriate for different purposes, parties and contexts. The WHPFI should seek professional expertise in stakeholder and community engagement to take an engagement strategy to the next level of development.

8. Identify roles and responsibilities for industry engagement

A comprehensive industry engagement strategy needs to be owned and driven by the WHPFI as a whole and should operate on a range of levels (i.e. regional, fishery, local scales). Consideration needs to be given to who will take responsibility for such a strategy and existing structures such as peak bodies and industry associations will have a key role. At a fishery level, and individual business level engagement is equally important with emphasis changing according to the business environment and respective priorities of those groups/entities.

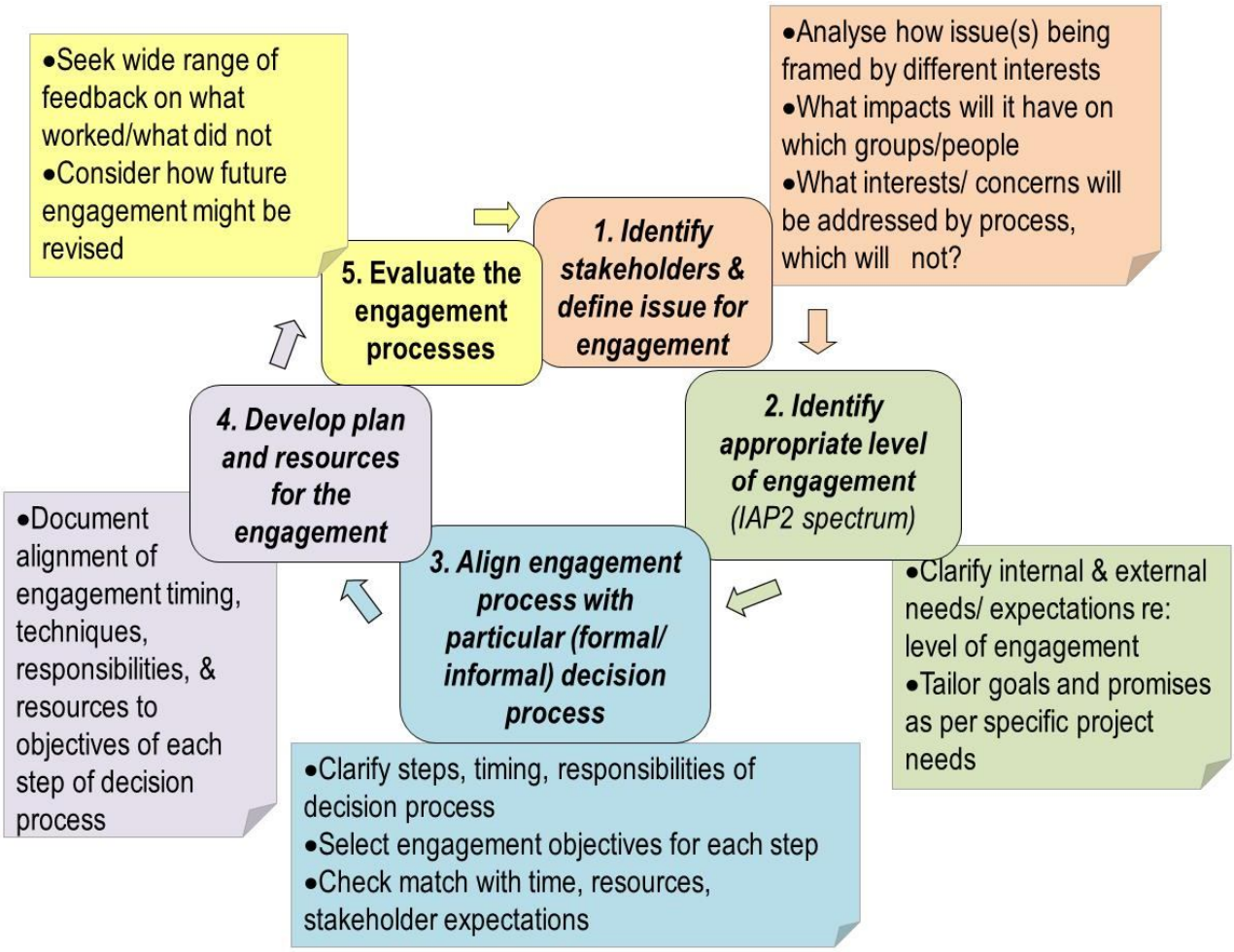
The LTF Project Team is aware of the extensive discussions about industry leadership and the need for a peak industry body to represent the diverse interests of the PWHFI. And such a body (with the assistance of community/stakeholder engagement professionals) would be the logical choice for driving the design and implementation of a sector-wide engagement strategy. However, fishing businesses, industry associations, individual fishers, and other groups along the supply chain should not necessarily wait for a peak body to be in place before take up many of the recommended approaches in this document. 'Leadership' takes many forms and does not have to be limited to

[10] For example, FRDC Projects 2012/500, 2012/402, 2011/410, 2011/409, 2011/400, 2011/525, 1999/356 and the current Women's Industry Network Seafood Community

authorising action from the 'top' of a hierarchy. There are already examples[11] where members of the WHPFI are seeking to build bridges of collaboration across the boundaries of stakeholder interests. These initiatives need to be widely showcased – demonstrating that it is possible to improve peoples' understanding of one another's values and interests so that compromise can be reached.

[11] Tassal Seafood's use of a community engagement program and officers.

Appendix 1. Good engagement is based on a reflective planning cycle



Appendix 2. The different purposes, promises and approaches of engagement

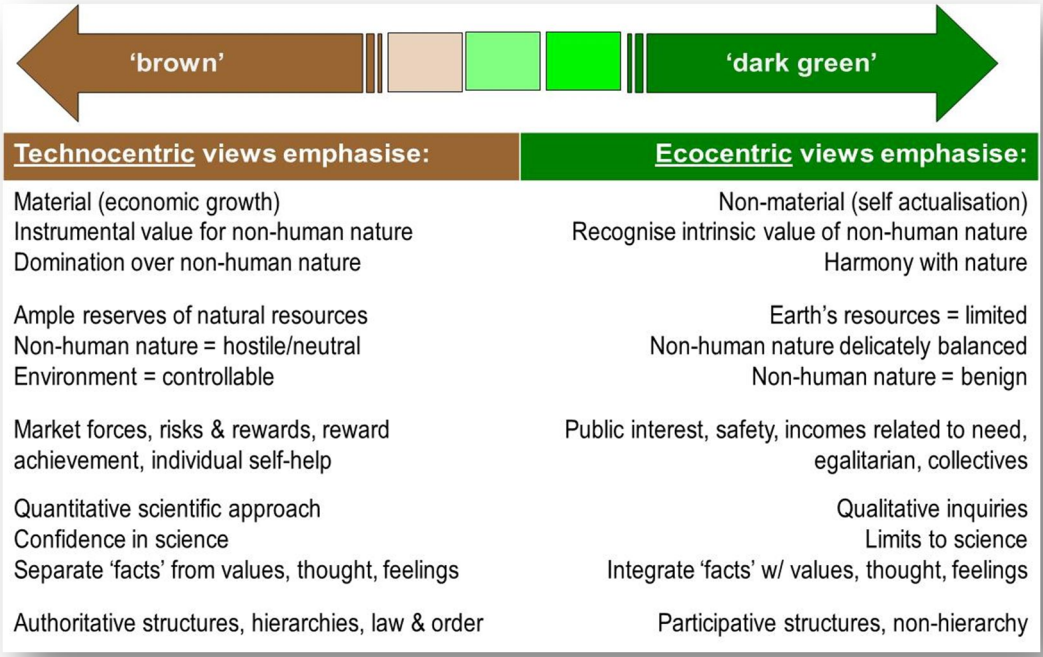
Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
		Objectives		
To provide participants with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with participants throughout the process to ensure that their issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with participants in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions.	To place final decision-making in the hands of participants.
		Promise to participants *(stakeholders, communities, 'the' public)*		
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
		Example approaches		
Fact sheets, web sites, displays.	Public & stakeholder comment, focus groups, surveys, public meetings, open houses.	Workshops, deliberative polling.	Advisory committees, consensus building.	Citizen juries, ballots, delegated decisions.

Source: International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) (2000-2006)

Appendix 3. How do environmental values differ?

Natural resource management, including fisheries, is full of uncertainty and complexities, which arise in decision making because of long time scales, information gaps, and competing values and information (Dovers et al 2008). Competing environmental values are especially relevant in a fisheries management context. Values are the guiding principles in people's lives – the things that are very important to them. There are many ways to understand people's environmental values and how those values can be contradictory. Some social scientists have talked about a spectrum of 'green' values in society that informs how people think about how society should be run, as well as how to address environmental and natural resource problems (see Figure 1). At the 'green' end of the spectrum, people are very concerned about how we treat non-human nature. They feel that non-human nature has worth distinct from what use we can put it to, so we are morally obliged to take care. At this end of the spectrum people tend to question economic growth and believe we should live more simply. At the 'brown' end of the spectrum, people tend to value non-human nature primarily on the basis of its usefulness to people. They also believe continued economic growth is critically important and will provide the technological and financial resources needed to address any environmental problems.

Figure 1. There is a spectrum of environmental values



However, it is important to note that these values and beliefs are not mutually exclusive. Not all programs, policies, or personal actions will further the environmental objectives or interests represented by either end of the spectrum. That is, there are many perspectives all along the spectrum, including the middle. For example, a fishing business seeking to maximise its profit margins, may recognise that marine mammals are worth saving and despite the cost will upgrade their by-catch reductions devices.

Appendix 4. Scanning check list for identifying potential social acceptability issues

What is the (current or potential) issue?

How might people be impacted by the issue?

Potential and/or perceived impacts	Degree of impact: none, low, medium, high	Degree of controversy: None, low, medium, high	For which stakeholders?
Livelihood, employment, lost productivity			
Property values			
Local economic vitality			
Personal health/safety			
Family health/safety			
Endangered environmental resources			
Nuisance factors			
Threats to cultural, racial identity			
Restricted freedom of choice			
Media coverage and/or interest			
Political controversy			
History of neglect or mistrust			
Equity concerns			
Others			

Meet with stakeholders, establish lines of communication; and seek to confirm issues

Refine impacts analysis by considering which are the most important

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