

Executive Summary

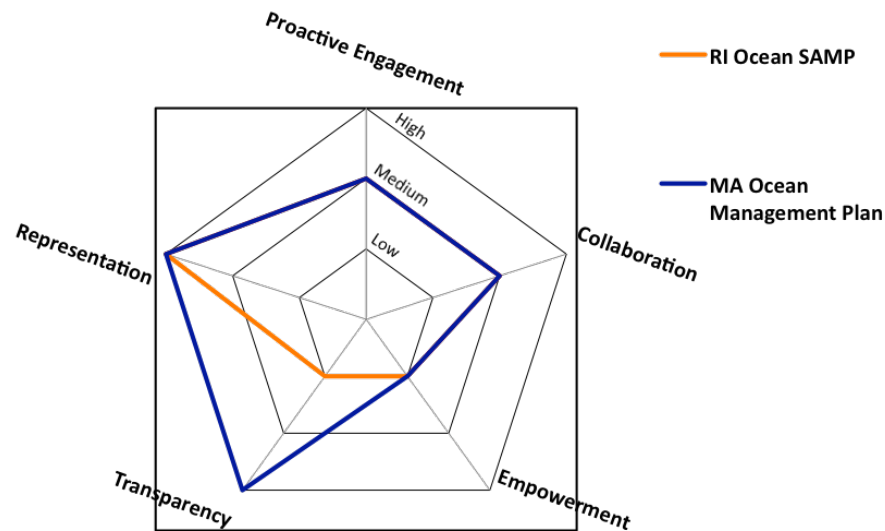
In New England, human activity has been intertwined with the oceans for hundreds of years. Port cities such as Gloucester, New Bedford, and Newport and many smaller communities have developed alongside a fishing industry that depends on ocean ecosystem services for livelihood, recreation, food, and inspiration. Yet presently, the world oceans' ability to sustain and nourish is compromised by climate change and other stressors such as nutrient pollution, declining fish stocks, and ocean acidification. Simultaneously, a growing demand for locally sourced renewable energy has made offshore wind development viable in parts of the US. Making space in the ocean for existing activities, new industry, and vital ecosystem functioning requires innovative management that works at multiple scales and balances conflicting priorities.

Presently, a fragmented ocean governance system has failed to capture the complexity of the ocean as a coupled social-ecological system by taking a sector-by-sector, rather than ecosystem-based approach such as marine spatial planning (MSP). MSP is a spatially focused approach to harmonize ocean uses and protection through a multi-stakeholder, collaborative decision-making process. It has been successfully implemented in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. In the US, two plans, the Massachusetts Ocean Management Plan and the Rhode Island Special Area Management Plan, have taken up the challenge of implementing MSP.

Both plans have centered their efforts on effectively partnering with stakeholders in the decision-making process. Many stakeholders engaged in these efforts, including recreational fishermen, renewable energy interests, recreational boaters, environmental groups and commercial fishermen. While all of these groups represent important interests, commercial fishermen were singled out in both plans as being of particular importance. During the processes that unfolded, fishermen participated extensively by attending meetings, advocating for their industry, and helping to shape the final results.

Examining fishermen's engagement in two case studies MSP can help inform a larger understanding of the role of stakeholders in MSP. ***This research sought to determine: How can fishermen be successfully engaged in the MSP decision-making process? What role did fishermen seek for themselves in the decision making process? What role did they actually play? How can these case studies lead to a better understanding of how to successfully engage commercial fishermen in MSP?*** These questions are becoming increasingly important as the development of a National Ocean Policy (NOP) for the US is being encouraged based on a coordinated, ecosystem-based framework. Questions of how fishermen will be involved and how their knowledge of the ocean will be incorporated into the NOP are yet to be determined.

Utilizing the extended case method¹, this research delved into the role commercial fishermen played in the two plans and the role they wanted to play through five elements needed for successful participation; transparency, proactive engagement, collaboration, representation, and empowerment. I conducted semi-structured interviews with commercial fishermen and managers in both states between August 2009 and March 2010. In addition, I conducted participant observation and archival research. I analyzed the information collected thematically, using NVIVO qualitative analysis software. The figure below depicts how the two plans achieved these five elements of participation. I assigned approximate value to each element, from high, medium to low, based on qualitative analysis.



There were a number of major differences and similarities between the Massachusetts Ocean Management Plan and the Rhode Island Ocean Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). In both states, managers were essentially seeking to plan for new activities such as offshore wind development while balancing existing ocean uses such as commercial fishing, transportation and recreation. In addition, both were driven by renewable energy directives from within the state focused on climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Finally, both states worked closely with commercial fishermen as well as other stakeholders to develop their final plans.

¹ Michael Burawoy explains that the extended case method “applies reflexive science to ethnography to extract the general from the unique, to move from the “micro” to the “macro,” and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on existing theory” (Burawoy 1998). This method differs from a traditional case study method by employing existing theory as the basis for inquiry while emphasizing ethnographic methods and, in particular, participant observation.

A number of differences were also apparent between the two state efforts. In Massachusetts the state developed new legislation, the Massachusetts Oceans Act of 2008, to implement MSP. This legislation included a clear description of the role of stakeholders and was written with significant participation by commercial fishermen. Rhode Island used existing legal authority through the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 and sought to extend their authority into federal waters through federal consistency determinations. Though it developed an extensive stakeholder process, its only legal requirement was through the Administrative Procedures Act of 1946. At the same time that the SAMP was being developed, Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri's administration was working to sign a purchase power agreement with energy developers.

Common themes emerged as to how commercial fishermen can be successfully engaged in MSP in the future. First, inequalities between stakeholder groups due to differential organizational capacity and access to resources can be detrimental to participation. This particularly impacts commercial fishermen's organizations, which are largely volunteer run and are informally structured. To facilitate a process where all participants can participate equally, managers should consider conducting *stakeholder analysis* prior to beginning a stakeholder process. Stakeholder analysis has a number of benefits. It can ensure that all interested parties are welcomed. In addition, stakeholder analysis can help identify the needs of groups during the process. For example, as I discovered while conducting interviews, commercial fishermen often travelled long distances to attend stakeholder meetings in both states. Knowing this in advance, managers can make meetings more accessible to fishermen by holding meetings closer to where they fish. Stakeholder analysis can help direct educational and outreach efforts and identify major interested parties. It provides background from which managers can tailor the process, if they truly seek full participation.

The second major finding related successfully engaging commercial fishermen in MSP is the need for a *clear legal framework* that portrays guiding principles and the role of stakeholders. One of the major differences between the Massachusetts Ocean Management Plan and the Rhode Island Ocean SAMP, as described above, was Massachusetts had a clear mandate for their Plan based on the Oceans Act of 2008, passed with strong stakeholder support. Rhode Island utilized existing legal authority as a platform to extend their jurisdiction into federal territory. For Rhode Island, this strategy led to questions among commercial fishermen over transparency, their role in the decision-making process, and the legitimacy of stakeholder participation. Thus, a clear legal framework that defines role, expectations, and goals for the process helps to create buy-in and trust among participants.

Last, managers seeking to engage commercial fishermen in MSP should *clearly communicate the role of stakeholders* in the process. Participation can vary from passive engagement, in which stakeholders provide information to managers, to proactive participation, in which stakeholders are integral to decision making. Commercial fishermen engage in a multitude of policy and management forums that have a direct impact on their livelihood. Communicating with stakeholders clearly about what managers are seeking facilitates greater transparency and productive engagement.

Studying just one stakeholder group illuminates the complexity of decision-making processes, particularly those that have a direct impact on the livelihood of an entire community. Commercial fishermen did not simply participate in these two plans in a vacuum. The implications of these plans were deeply entangled with that of a shift towards a sector allocation approach for fisheries, a community of fishermen struggling to communicate to the large public and policymakers, and a restrictive fishery management system that has forced many out of the industry. Fishermen are facing major transitions as the way we utilize and value ocean resources itself is shifting. How they are engaged in these transitions will undoubtedly have reverberating impacts on the legitimacy of these plans, Massachusetts and Rhode Island fishing communities and the industry as a whole.

Take Home Messages for Ocean Managers Seeking to Engage Fishermen in MSP

1. Stakeholder analysis is an essential first step in developing an equitable process for stakeholder participation.
2. A clear legal framework for developing and implementing MSP that includes clarification on the role of stakeholders allows for greater transparency.
3. A process that communicates clearly the role of stakeholders is more effective. It is important to clarify the degree of citizen participation sought, such as full shared authority, information sharing, negotiated rulemaking, etc.