



BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT – UK FISHING COMMUNITIES CASE STUDIES

BLUEPrint for Marine Protected Areas:
A guide to establishing and managing MPAs



Developing collaborative management within marine protected areas

There are many Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) where fishing can continue because it is managed or operates in a way that ensures protection of the species and habitats for which a site has been designated. Even where the majority of fishing practices are permitted, there can be resistance to the creation of MPAs and the fishing community needs to be fully engaged in the process of designation and ongoing management to ensure the success of the MPA. The development of approaches that engage

all interested parties from the outset and highlight how MPAs can deliver economic, cultural and social benefits to communities is an effective and enduring way of achieving much higher levels of effective protection.

Blue Marine has worked with a number of fishing communities in the UK to support a collaborative approach to management within MPAs. Specific projects are described in the BLUEPrint case studies for Berwickshire, Jersey and Lyme Bay, but here we summarise some of the things we have learnt that have helped build trust and constructively engage low impact fishermen in their local MPA.



WHERE TO START

The key advice is to listen – understand the local fishing history, what species they fish for and with what methods, where they fish and what issues and challenges they face in making a living from fishing. It's also important to get their perspective on how they think fish stocks have changed over the years and what they think the solutions are.

Making initial contact can be challenging as fishermen are often out at sea a lot of the time and when they are ashore they might not have time to attend lengthy meetings. There is also a natural level of distrust about the motive for engagement, often driven by an assumption that restrictions will be imposed on their fishing activity if they share information about how much and where they fish or help with fisheries research. Overcoming this takes time and patience and is best achieved by building a relationship and trust. This includes a regular presence in their ports, being clear and honest about the reasons for engaging with them and identifying issues of common concern. For example, is there a source of pollution that has affected local fish stocks? Is there conflict between different gear types which might be collectively addressed? It is useful to think about how you can tackle these issues along with the fishermen, as this will show them that you share their concerns on some topics and want to help resolve problems that might be affecting their fishery as well as local marine life.



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KEY POINTS FOR INITIAL ENGAGEMENT

There are several things to consider when initiating engagement with the fishing community:

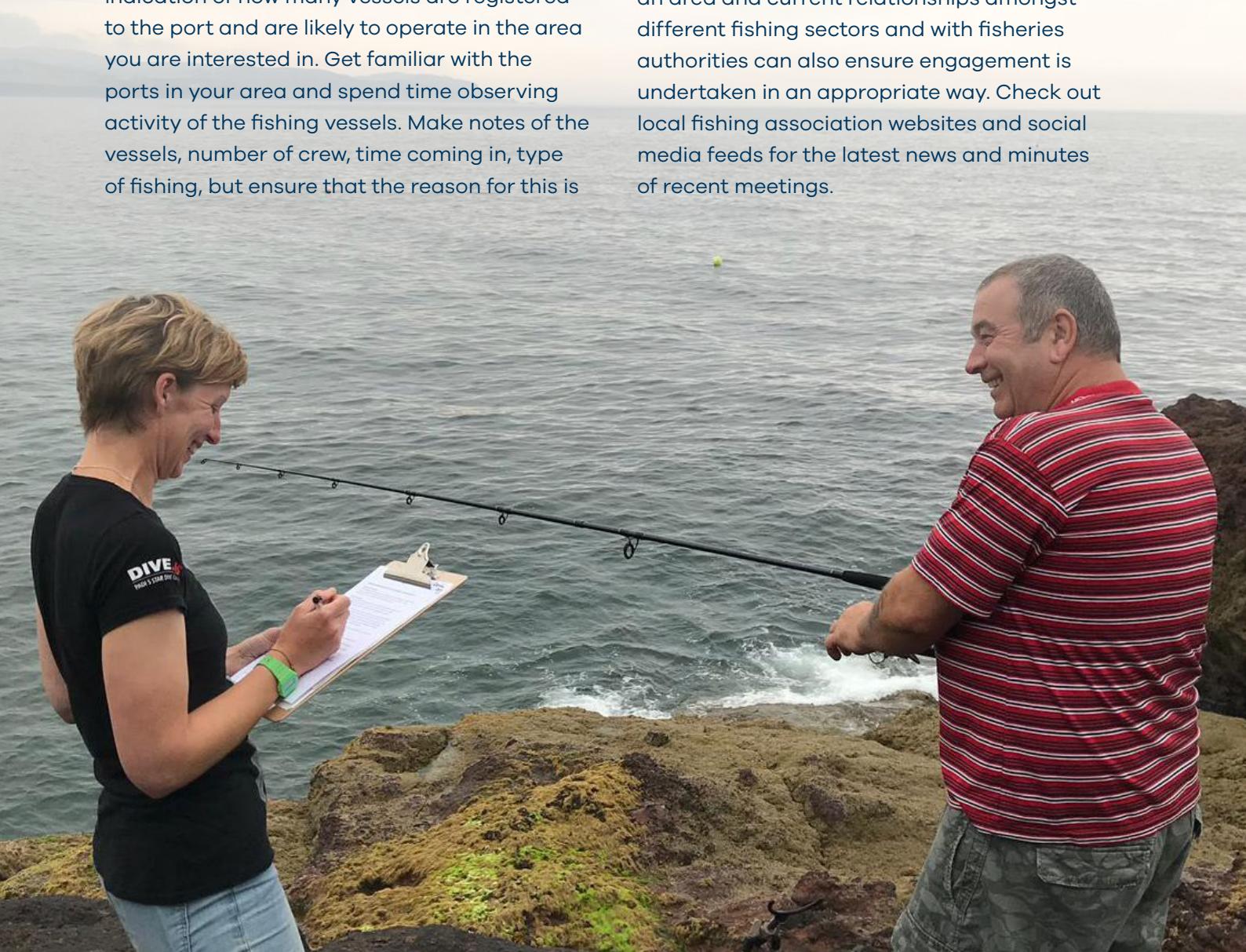
Port recce

Before your first visit to the local fishing ports and harbours, consult the Government's fishing vessel database. You can filter vessels by port, species and vessel size. This gives you an indication of how many vessels are registered to the port and are likely to operate in the area you are interested in. Get familiar with the ports in your area and spend time observing activity of the fishing vessels. Make notes of the vessels, number of crew, time coming in, type of fishing, but ensure that the reason for this is

communicated clearly to any fishermen in the harbour. If it looks like you are spying on them, you will get rejected instantly.

Scoping

Familiarise yourself with common fishing concerns in an area, for example, sedimentation or pollution, as this will provide you with a conversation starter and topic of shared concern. Having an underlying understanding of the political context of an area and current relationships amongst different fishing sectors and with fisheries authorities can also ensure engagement is undertaken in an appropriate way. Check out local fishing association websites and social media feeds for the latest news and minutes of recent meetings.



Plan ahead

Before you make contact with fishermen ensure you are clear what it is you want to speak to them about, keep it simple and don't overload them with information. Ask yourself what one key thing you would like to put across during your conversation. This could be:

- To simply introduce yourself and your project (keep it short and clear). Be transparent about what you are there for and trying to achieve.
- To promote a workshop or meeting you are going to host and want fishermen to attend.

Be realistic

Don't put too much pressure on yourself, start with one action or question and see where the conversation goes. Don't be disheartened if you only manage to introduce yourself or don't manage to have a conversation. Fishermen are busy and work long unsociable hours, so when they come into port their focus is on getting their catch to market as quickly as possible to maintain quality and freshness. If they don't have time for you, don't press the point, just let them know that you'll try and come back at a better time that suits them.

Start small

Identify and speak to a couple of fishermen first, then organise a small meeting to learn about the issues in the area that directly affect them. Only after these initial small group conversations consider bringing in other stakeholders to a wider meeting to discuss the area as a whole and other views. This will help ensure that when you bring the fishermen together for a larger event with potentially new stakeholders, they feel that their voices and input have been prioritised and will be heard alongside those of the scientists and managers.

Notes

Following any conversations with fishermen, make sure to capture notes. Do this as soon as possible whilst the conversations are still fresh. Create a table or spreadsheet to record harbour, date, boat name, fishermen and conversation notes. Make sure to let a fisherman know if you will be taking notes, as any publication or sharing of conversations without their consent could lead to a breach of trust.

Feedback

Always ensure you feedback regularly to the fishermen you engage with. One of the biggest complaints Blue Marine hears from fishermen is that they filled in a questionnaire or attended an event or workshop and heard nothing back, or they took a scientist or researcher out on their boat and never heard again. It's important to build in feedback to projects to ensure ongoing communication, maintain trust and manage expectations.

Communication preferences

When engaging with fishermen ask them what their preferred method of contact with you is – phone, text, email, social media, in person etc. Ask them if it's okay for you to contact them and highlight that you will only contact them for the reason you specify e.g., to inform them when there is a meeting, or to let them know about some relevant research. Many fishermen are reluctant to deal with emails or long messages that require a lot of their time to read, so be prepared to organise research, workshops or conversations entirely over the phone or in person.

Avoiding confrontation

Be aware of topics or wording that may be triggering or cause confrontation e.g. implementing fishing restrictions on their specific fishery or the big issue of overfishing, and plan how to navigate these conversations. This is different in every location. Be transparent about what your aims are but find common ground with the fishermen and frame the conversation or workshop/research in a way that you are both working together to achieve the same outcome (e.g. improved fish stocks). To avoid confrontation in a new port, begin by introducing yourself to the potting industry first to start building a relationship with all the fishermen.

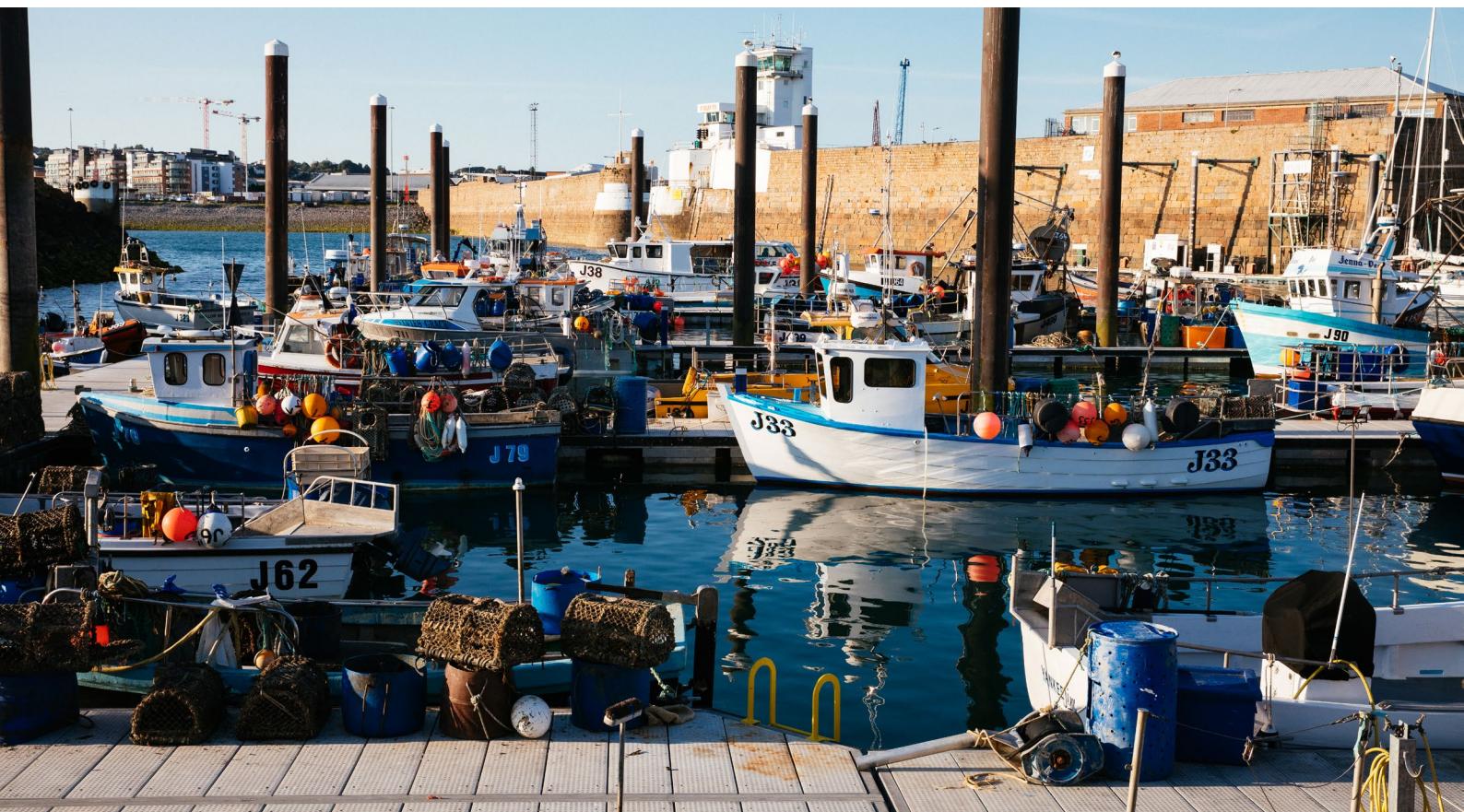
Language

Use of fishing language and phrases can help to build relationships and trust that you understand their work and day-to-day. Try not to use too much scientific or technical jargon, it's often more casual and friendly conversations that get the best outcomes. When referring to MPAs

or protected zones, find out how the local fishermen refer to them as it is different in every area and not all fishermen will know what MPAs are. Be aware that fishermen have different names for things across the country, so if you are going to use fishing terms, make sure you know the terms used for that area.

Training and support for engagement staff

Unless you've been a fisherman yourself or have lived in the area alongside them, it can take time to build trust and acceptance with a fishing community. Listening openly and without judgement to what they have to say and respecting their knowledge and experience of the area as of equal value and importance to any scientific studies is very important. Engagement staff might benefit from training or speaking to others with previous experience to understand the most effective approach and how to deal with behaviours that may sometimes feel confrontational.



MEETINGS

First meeting

- Organise the meeting at a time that's best for the fishermen. Around 2-3pm is often a good time when they have come in from a day's fishing and still down the harbour, or on an evening when they have had time to eat.
- Only plan for an hour initially so no one feels they must give up an entire evening. If some choose to stay on a bit longer to chat, that's a bonus. Usually the best conversations are the ones outside the main meeting when individual fishermen may feel more comfortable talking to you directly rather than in an open forum.
- Choose a venue that will be familiar to the fishermen, requires minimum travel and where refreshments can be provided. Conversations that occur on a fisherman's boat, or in their local pub, are often the most open and honest, as they are usually the places that they feel most comfortable.
- Promote the event through posters on harbour notice boards, or venues where fishermen will see them (tea kiosks, chandlers, harbour office, local fish merchants). If there are local fishermen associations or groups already established, approach the chair and ask them if they would consider encouraging fishermen to attend.



- Not all fishermen will get on with all fishermen so it is best not to assume – find out if there are any tricky relationships or individuals that are best approached separately.
- Set up the room so it's as inclusive as possible – seated around a large table rather than in rows facing one direction.
- Keep the agenda open and don't be too ambitious in terms of what you expect to get from the first meeting.
- Have a chart of the local area so they can show the areas where they fish, talk about any changes they have observed in specific areas and any areas where there is conflict with other fishing or non-fishing activities. Always remember to use the word 'chart' rather than 'map', as this is the word used for the sea rather than the land.

Second meeting

- Before asking to hear from the fishermen, start by introducing yourself, your team and the reason you want to speak to them. Be clear, stick to one or two main aims and try do this in a couple of sentences. Allow for any general questions, then open the meeting by asking each fisherman what they expect from the meeting and would like to get out of it.
- Ask open questions to understand how the fishery has changed, what challenges they face, what would improve the local fishery and what they'd like to see the future look like:

What has changed in the local fishery:

- How has fishing changed over time?
- Are they catching the same types of fish or has this changed?
- Have they had to change where or how they fish?
- What caused any changes in fishing in their lifetime?

Their goals and vision for the future:

- What does the ideal future look like for fishing in the area?
- What are the risks/barriers to achieving that?



Challenges they face:

- Are they affected by other fishing practices?
- Is there competition for fishing grounds?
- What other activities impact on their fishing?
- Have they had to adapt the way they fish?
- Have they received any local or national support to adapt to new ways of fishing?

What needs to change to improve their fishing:

- What actions are needed to improve fish stocks in their area?
- What actions are needed to reduce competition for fishing grounds?
- What actions are needed to reduce impacts on fishing from other activities?
- What support do they need to achieve a sustainable income from fishing?

- Have a lead person/facilitator to guide everyone through the meeting; a note taker or someone to write key points and ideas on post it notes or flip charts; and someone who can pick up any side conversations or people who are not speaking up.
- Ask everyone at the end of the meeting if they would be interested in a follow up conversation and how they would like to be kept engaged with any developments. If you do this, make sure you definitely do follow up with it.
- Be honest about timeframes for moving things forward and manage expectations

in terms of what can be delivered and what your organisation's role is and which other stakeholders will need to be involved to progress any actions. Avoid giving a date, as if this date isn't met, this can lead to further trust issues.

- Follow up the meeting as soon as possible with a summarised note of the key points raised and next steps.
- Speak to the fishermen in person where possible to get their individual feedback on what they found useful and what they think the priority next steps are and how they think they can be involved moving forward.



LARGER STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

At some point in the development of a management plan for a marine protected area and/or sustainable fisheries, wider stakeholder workshops will be needed to bring together fishermen and other users of the area to agree the approach. When planning such a workshop consider the following:

Stakeholder mapping

Identify the key stakeholders that use or manage the area:

- Fishery representatives – both commercial and recreational: local fishermen, fisherman associations, fish merchants,
- National/regional Government bodies and regulators: with responsibilities for fisheries management, nature conservation, marine development
- Local government officials – Councillors, MPs
- Port and harbour authorities
- Marine user groups – diving, watersports
- Science and research institutes
- Conservation groups



Stakeholder perspectives

Think about the viewpoint that each stakeholder may approach the conversation around management:

- Values
- How their activity currently interacts with the proposed area
- Potential financial loss/gain
- Recreational/cultural use
- Number of people represented
- Priorities for area use
- Pressures created by change in area use
- Spatial/temporal use of area
- Perceptions towards existing or proposed management

Management options

- Keep an open mind on what management options might be best for the specific area to address the conservation issue and/or support sustainable low-impact fisheries within the MPA. Gather suggestions from stakeholders and create a list of options for further consideration.
- Spatial closure (to allow fishing grounds to recover, or protect nursery grounds)
- Temporal closure
- Gear type restrictions/modifications (pot limits, net length, mesh sizes)
- Catch limits
- Species size restrictions – minimum and maximum landing sizes
- Prohibited species
- Bycatch management restrictions
- Measures to prevent/reduce impact of lost fishing gear (e.g. escape panels)
- Measures to increase survival rates of discards
- Diversification of species targeted
- Voluntary codes of conduct
- Phased introduction of limits/restrictions
- Vessel tracking to verify traceability

- Chain of custody management
- Technology (e.g. social media and blockchain) to market sustainable, traceable seafood
- Sustainable accreditation / certification (e.g. Marine Stewardship Council)
- Net collection and recycling

Gather suggestions from stakeholders and create a list of options for further consideration



BERWICKSHIRE SHELLFISH SYMPOSIUM CASE STUDY

An example of such a workshop was a Shellfish Symposium organised by Blue Marine in Berwickshire, UK to identify a vision for the Berwickshire shellfish fishery.

In 2018 Blue Marine formed a partnership with the Berwickshire Marine Reserve (BMR) to foster a regional approach to management which centres around collaboration between fishermen, conservationists, scientists and regulators, based on the model applied within the Lyme Bay Reserve.

In October 2019, a Shellfish Symposium brought together representatives from the fishing industry, regulators, scientists, NGOs and some of the local fishing community. The Symposium aimed to build consensus around a need for a more regional approach to managing shellfish stocks.

A series of short talks were presented in the morning from researchers, government bodies, local groups and NGOs, followed in the afternoon with a number of break out groups with members drawn from the different stakeholder groups including fishermen.

Each group was asked to:

- Create a vision for the Berwickshire shellfish fishery. What would their dream fishery look like in 5-10 years?
- Define what that vision looks like in terms of key components and stakeholders.
- Identify the barriers and problems that would get in the way of achieving that vision.
- Groups then chose their top problem and worked to identify the causes and effects of that problem and possible solutions.

IFG, locality, Traceability, Diversity, Seasonality, Current Data, **Regional,** Fully Documented, Well managed,
supportive, **Scientific Data**, cooperation, recognition, profitable, **Sustainable,**
QUICK efficient, safety, **communication**, Pilot, Ecosystem approach, community, Stakeholders, Evidence, Effective,
management, innovative, **Partnership Working**, Cross Border, **collaboration**, informed, easy,
adaptive, **Enforcement.**

The Berwickshire Shellfish Symposium outputs were combined with outputs from other engagement initiatives including the initial Berwickshire Fishermen Workshop and a Static Gear Issue survey. By asking similar questions through a combination of fishermen workshops, wider stakeholder events and surveys, key common themes were identified which have the

buy-in of the various stakeholders, creating a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for working towards a solution that benefits the environment and local fisheries.

The outcomes from these engagement initiatives are captured in the following table:

Summary of main themes and outcomes from the Berwickshire Shellfish Symposium, Berwickshire Fishermen Workshops and NECRIFG Static Gear Issues survey.

Berwickshire Shellfish Symposium	Berwickshire Fishermen Workshops themes and outcomes	NECRIFG outcome report findings from survey about static gear issues
No management for the number of pots. Effective pot limits needed.	Too many pots. The ground is saturated, and we are competing for space in the summer.	68.7% believe there should be management measures to control the number of creels.
Shouldn't be allowed to land berried lobsters in Scotland. Should be aligned with England regulation on this.	Should V-notch berried hens. Suggested introducing a law to stop the landing of berried hens in Scotland.	67.2% believe berried hens should be V-notched. 82% believe red berried hens should not be landed.
There is a lack of cross border collaboration.	Different regulation on each side of the border. Makes it difficult to keep on top of regulation change.	53% are aware of illegal activity occurring in the region – unlicensed fishermen flouting the rules. Not marking buoys properly.
Enforcement – Marine Scotland has no capacity or funds to do their job effectively.	Lack of enforcement which leads to gear conflict. Conflict between inshore fishermen competing for space and conflict with offshore trawlers towing their gear away.	82% have not reported illegal activity to Marine Scotland Compliance Hotline.
Needs to be better communication of fisheries research – to the fishermen, public and stakeholders.	There needs to be a feedback loop from scientist to fishermen / government to fishermen.	82.1% believe it should be a requirement to lift unworked creels.
Need more data on fisheries.	Need diversification of markets and merchants.	59.7% said there should not be a limit put on soak times.

This powerpoint provides a potential outline for an initial workshop with fishermen, together with the outcomes from workshops held in Berwickshire and North Devon.

ENGAGING WITH FISHERMEN FOR RESEARCH

Fishermen have a wealth of local knowledge and experience of how the fishing grounds and stocks have changed over the years.

- Work with local fishermen to identify areas of research that address specific issues of concern to them. Such fisher-led research projects help build a sense of partnership working toward common goals.
- Paying local fishermen to take out researchers rather than chartering a vessel provides an incentive for them to participate. Be sure to agree a day rate beforehand that includes fuel costs and be prepared to pay in advance to cover their costs.
- Engage fishermen in the survey design, particularly site selection as they often know the grounds and habitats better than any existing maps which can often be out of date.
- Be prepared for fishermen to suggest early starts to align with the time they usually go out fishing. Some fishermen also want to fit in their fishing in the same day, so try to be as flexible as possible.

- Undertaking written surveys with fishermen can be challenging when they are extremely busy, especially when the surveys are long. Selecting the most important and key questions out of a long survey and having them written down on paper to ask in person in a more conversational manner is much more likely to increase engagement.
- Be sure to feedback any research results and reports to the fishermen you work with. Consider arranging an evening presentation to their local fishing association or local community. This creates a sense of shared ownership and recognises the value of their involvement.



USEFUL REFERENCES

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- WWF & Natural England. (2017). Techniques for engaging stakeholders in dialogue about MPA governance. Prepared for WWF in partnership with Natural England by Teresa Bennett, Natural Values and Roger Morris, Bright Angel Coastal Consultants

Bognor Fishermen and Blue Marine on Bognor Regis beach 2021





Jim Newton, Beer, Lyme Bay © James Bowden



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