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Communications and Marine Spatial Planning: Engaging Stakeholders and Building Public Support

At a recent meeting of ocean planners in North America, the question was asked:

"How do you make the concept of marine spatial planning *interesting*?"

The fact is, unless there is an immediate need for MSP in a particular region - like when offshore wind projects move into an area with other existing uses - the concept can seem abstract or even irrelevant to current user groups. ("Why do we need to plan the ocean if things are fine as they are?") In such cases, it may even seem easier for opponents to build a constituency against MSP - "The government is trying to zone the oceans and take away your use rights!" - than for proponents to build one for it.

To engage stakeholders and gain their support for MSP processes, planners must interest them in the subject at hand. Without overselling the promise of MSP, they need to explain what the process can offer, including in cases when there may seem to be no pressing need. In this issue, MEAM asks practitioners how they have addressed this challenge.

A. Vancouver Island, Canada: "We wanted people to say, 'MSP makes sense - actually, it's kind of cool'"

Andrew Day is managing director for West Coast Aquatic, a management body established by federal, provincial, local, and aboriginal governments in Canada to undertake cooperative marine management. The focus of its work is the West coast of Vancouver Island in the Pacific province of British Columbia. With its board of eight governmental and eight non-governmental representatives, West Coast Aquatic is leading marine spatial planning initiatives in its region.

To describe to communities, stakeholders, and governments why and how West Coast Aquatic is applying MSP, Day and his team created a video that takes a light-hearted, hand-drawn approach to the subject (<http://westcoastaquatic.ca/plans/marine-planning-video/>). West Coast Aquatic shows the video at local meetings and events, as well as making it available online.

MEAM: The West Coast Aquatic marine planning video is conversational and informal. What did you want to achieve by taking this nontraditional approach to MSP communications?

Andrew Day: Our goal was for audience members to feel that they could understand MSP and see its value. We wanted people to say, "Yeah, of course, that makes sense. Actually, it's kind of cool." And our goal was to have fun and represent our organization's vibe. We were also clear on what we didn't want to do, which was some big, complicated, boring, and threatening hoo-ha. There is a lot of condescending stuff out there with a basic message of "MSP is the savior and you are ignorant and we know what is right for you." Yuck.

MEAM: How did you create the video?

Day: We did it in-house. I just started talking, Kelly drew, and Jake took notes. Then we could see the natural groupings of concepts and we could see what worked and what didn't. If you can't easily draw it, it's too complicated! The video is not perfect, but we did our best by having fun together, calling some friends who could teach us the technology, focusing on the audience, and working hard.

MEAM: Would you recommend that more MSP projects adopt a similarly light-hearted, visually inventive approach like yours?

Day: In general, yes. I think we should honor and recognize the power that artists and entertainers have to make complex concepts understandable and to make people feel something. If MSP practitioners do not connect with the people affected, it will take longer, cost more, produce poor results, and be a drag for everyone. Having said all that, there are lots of ways of connecting. Face to face is the best. And it isn't easy to do entertainment - there is a very small zone between too light and too serious.

For more information: Andrew Day, West Coast Aquatic, Port Alberni, British Columbia, Canada. Email: day@westcoastaquatic.ca

B. The Azores: "Our efforts are directed toward the opening of new opportunities"

The nine-island archipelago of the Azores, an autonomous region of Portugal, is located 1500 km² west of Lisbon. The Azores have a large EEZ - 1.1 million km² - but a relatively small population of 245,000 people. When the Azorean government started a process in 2011 of developing a maritime spatial plan, the concept of MSP was new to many stakeholders. Azorean waters have no large industries and the pressure on resources is not particularly high: the Azorean fishing fleet is primarily artisanal, consisting of small boats. Furthermore, there are already rules in place for fisheries, tourism, and other uses. Trawling, for example, is prohibited throughout Azorean waters.

Frederico Cardigos is regional director for sea affairs for the Azorean government, and oversees the MSP process.

MEAM: When you speak to stakeholders, how do you explain what MSP is and why it is needed in Azorean waters?

Frederico Cardigos: Our efforts are directed toward the opening of new opportunities, including exploration for deep-sea minerals. In other words, our focus is not on

targeting the existing activities, but on being inspirational to new marine uses. Of course, we include the characterization of the sea, state the current uses and rules, and emphasize the overlapping of activities. If needed, priorities for use will be established. Some fisheries, for example, may have to be discontinued in especially sensitive areas, such as historical wrecks and areas with obvious use for science.

MEAM: Would you recommend that all MSP initiatives focus their language on new opportunities rather than restrictions on use?

Cardigos: In general, yes. Nevertheless, if use conflicts are already huge or if there are unprotected values that must be accounted for - such as sensitive species protection - the language will obviously need to be adapted to fit the circumstances. In the Azores, we are fortunate that the heavier industrial pressures like marine transportation or mining of aggregates do not demand much space or resources, and sensitive areas and species are already protected under specific legislation. Therefore, in our particular case, those issues will not need to be readdressed in the MSP process, leaving space for the new opportunities.

MEAM: Has there been any resistance to MSP so far from stakeholders or various government agencies in the Azores?

Cardigos: So far so good. No opposition from stakeholders has arisen. From the government agencies we had no resistance, but we are facing a certain amount of lethargy in receiving some of their inputs. Due to the fact that MSP has not been considered a priority by all government agencies, the internal bureaucracies involved - and especially the incapacity to take the time needed to focus on such a demanding task within each agency - has delayed the MSP process. However, we have opted to take the time needed to get everyone on board and make sure that our MSP is a truly participative process.

For more information: Frederico Cardigos, Government of the Azores. Email: Frederico.AD.Cardigos@azores.gov.pt

C. The film *Ocean Frontiers*: "Stories told by real people can persuade audiences"

The documentary film *Ocean Frontiers: Dawn of a New Era in Ocean Stewardship* aims to help audiences understand key principles of EBM and marine spatial planning, profiling success stories that focus on a broad range of stakeholders across the US (www.ocean-frontiers.org). Karen Anspacher-Meyer, who produced the film for Green Fire Productions, intended it to inspire audiences to get involved with MSP. *Ocean Frontiers* does this in part by showing how unlikely allies - from upstream farmers to industrial shippers to recreational fishers and others - have cooperated to sustain ocean health and coastal economies.

Over the past year, Green Fire and its partners have organized 174 *Ocean Frontiers*-related events for some 14,000 people in 31 US states, 2 US territories, and 9 countries. The venues have ranged from the US Department of State, to coastal planning meetings, to theaters, classrooms and aquariums. In surveys following the film, 85% of audience members have reported an increase in understanding about MSP, and 94% reported the film inspired them to participate in MSP processes.

MEAM: With *Ocean Frontiers*, was it a specific goal of yours to make MSP interesting to the people viewing it?

Karen Anspacher-Meyer: We hear how difficult it is to speak effectively about marine spatial planning so that people not only understand the concept but see it as a solution they want to be a part of. *Ocean Frontiers* addresses this challenge with a plainspoken style of storytelling that has proven itself effective toward increasing understanding and support for MSP. It is a tool for persuasive communication.

As we began producing the film, we realized there were some terrific examples of initial work on MSP in the US, with inspiring people doing groundbreaking work. It wasn't just one group of people, either: these were often competing interests coming together to find solutions. Audiences tell us *Ocean Frontiers* avoids pointing fingers and conveys the stories in an inclusive style, leaving them with the understanding that collaboration among stakeholders is possible and vital to ocean management. We all have a role to play.

MEAM: You purposefully avoided the term "marine spatial planning" in your movie. Why?

Anspacher-Meyer: We chose to avoid the term because we were aiming for a fairly general audience and marine spatial planning is essentially an insider term. One rule concerning the narration of our films is that if the average person has to think about the meaning of a particular word, don't use it. You are going to lose your audience every time they have to think about the meaning of a particular word or phrase. Use simple and direct terms - like ocean planning - and then your audience stays with you and follows the logic of the story.

MEAM: As a filmmaker, you tell stories for a living. How important is storytelling in communicating new concepts to audiences, and what kinds of stories should ocean planners tell to engage their audiences?

Anspacher-Meyer: Storytelling is critically important in communicating new concepts to lay audiences. I've seen over and over that stories told by real, credible people working together to make authentic change are one of the most effective ways to persuade audiences to consider changing their opinions and behavior.

Choosing the right storyteller or "messenger" is crucial. Think about who the audience is and who they would listen to. If you are reaching out to fishermen, fishermen are your best storytellers. If you have a broad audience like we do with *Ocean Frontiers*, a broad range of people need to be part of the story: decision-makers, scientists, industry leaders, conservationists.

We hear from many people that they are tired of the doom-and-gloom stories often associated with ocean policy - how ocean health is suffering and who is at fault. *Ocean Frontiers* shows that MSP represents a way to break out of that mindset, with real examples that affirm the vital link between healthy oceans and healthy communities.

For more information: Karen Anspacher-Meyer, Green Fire Productions, US. Email: karen@greenfireproductions.org

Editor's note: *Ocean Frontiers* is available in several lengths, as well as a version with Spanish subtitles. It is free of charge to all who would like to use it in their work. Visit the website ocean-frontiers.org to learn more.

D. Rhode Island, US: "Not a flashy advertisement for MSP; our audience would see through that"

A four-part series of short films on MSP was produced around the International Marine Spatial Planning Symposium, held in May 2012 in the US state of Rhode Island. Designed to capture key findings from the meeting, the series also aimed to communicate MSP concepts to policy-makers and stakeholder groups, particularly in the US.

The films were produced by the Rhode Island Sea Grant Program in partnership with Zygote Digital Films, a private company. Together they interviewed more than 30 symposium attendees from around the world, each for 30-45 minutes. Transcribed, the interviews came out to nearly 800 pages of content, which were edited down to four 8-minute films. The films consist of:

- An overview of MSP
- A film on offshore renewable energy issues as they relate to MSP
- A film on fisheries and MSP
- A film on the environmental implications of MSP

All four "Marine Spatial Planning Series" films are available at www.youtube.com/user/RISeaGrant. Jen McCann oversaw the symposium and the films for Rhode Island Sea Grant; Dorria Marsh managed the project for Zygote Digital Films.

MEAM: You gathered more than 20 hours of interview footage of MSP practitioners at the symposium, then had to distill it down to about 30 minutes. How did you decide what would go into the finished videos?

Jen McCann: We started by "scripting" the videos even before we conducted the interviews. By this I mean our team developed the main messages and key objectives for

each film. There was a tremendous amount of research that went into this: anticipating what each interviewee would be able to talk about, based on his or her experience, then developing an individualized set of questions for that person. As a result, each film had a pre-scripted outline that we were able to fill in with the filmed interviews and additional visual content. So although we had a lot of content, it was already organized to some extent, and we just had to edit it down to be as concise and clear as it could be.

MEAM: The films have a distinct look: very modern with multiple images and camera angles. Was this part of your messaging?

Dorria Marsh: First, with so many different people being interviewed, and with the edited clips of each person being only a few seconds long in most cases, we needed to ensure the films had a consistent look and feel. The design helps with that. At the same time, we wanted the overall experience with the audience to be a little bit exciting. Not in a flashy advertisement sort of way - our target audience would be able to see through that. What we wanted was a lightness in the look to balance out the informational aspect of the content. And by using multiple images on screen at once, we could cover more ground in less time without necessarily overwhelming the viewer. If the films were going to engage the target audience, we couldn't allow them to become boring.

For more information:

Jen McCann, Rhode Island Sea Grant, US. Email: mccann@crc.uri.edu

Dorria Marsh, Zygote Digital Films, Rhode Island, US. Email: dorriam@gmail.com

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