

Making the Most of Stakeholder Involvement in EBM: Practitioners and Researchers Share their Insights

In ecosystem-based management, people are considered to be part of the ecosystem. As such, EBM decisions not only take ecological factors into account but also the economic and social conditions that affect, or are affected by, the environment. The idea is to build a framework for management that ensures a sustainable environment and sustainable human communities over time.

Considering the central role that socioeconomic factors play in EBM, stakeholders are usually involved in various ways in developing and implementing an EBM framework. (For the purposes of this article, stakeholders are defined as people or organizations with an interest in how an ecosystem is managed: residents, resource users, conservationists, and so on.) Several benefits can come from involving stakeholders in EBM, including:

- **More information:** By collecting locals' knowledge of the ecosystem, managers can access a much broader base of information on environmental and socioeconomic factors than they otherwise would.
- **Increased trust:** Particularly through face-to-face meetings with managers, stakeholder participation can help build trust and break down walls between community members and authorities.
- **Greater buy-in:** Management strategies developed with stakeholders may fit better within the local context and involve less economic upheaval than otherwise. This can increase community support for the decisions and make implementation more feasible.

With these benefits in mind, there are experts who recommend involving stakeholders as early, and as often, as possible in EBM planning and implementation. However, stakeholder participation brings its own set of challenges. As many EBM practitioners know well, meetings with stakeholders can be time-consuming and expensive in terms of money and personnel. Also, depending on how their participation is structured, stakeholders may end up impacting EBM planning processes in ways that make the resulting management less effective. A process where decisions require 100% approval by stakeholders, for example, can be susceptible to one person's holding up the process until his or her interests are prioritized.

For a stakeholder process to be productive, it should inform management decisions that are consistent with a sustainable environment and sustainable communities over time. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Some successful projects have involved stakeholders in a largely consultative manner (i.e., asking for their insights and opinions), after which final decisions are made by a central authority. Others apply a more collaborative approach, in which local community members share EBM decision-making power with authorities. The "right" approach to stakeholder involvement depends on each project's context.

In this issue, MEAM examines EBM projects that have used very different approaches to stakeholder participation - Australia's Great Barrier Reef and locally-managed marine areas in the Western Pacific. We also ask researchers who have studied EBM stakeholder processes for their advice on ensuring productive outcomes.

A. Applying a consultative approach: Rezoning the Great Barrier Reef

By Leanne Fernandes

[Editor's note: Nearly a decade ago, Leanne Fernandes managed a multi-year process to rezone the 344,000-km² Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP). Called the Representative Areas Program, the process resulted in substantial changes to the park's zoning scheme. Most significant, and controversial, was that portions of the park that were off-limits to fishing increased from 4.6% to 33% of the total area. The planning process was subject to two substantial community participation phases in which all components of the zoning plan were open to comment and alteration. The first phase drew more than 10,000 written submissions from stakeholders. The second phase drew 21,000 submissions. Overall, park personnel attended more than 1000 public meetings and information sessions with stakeholders along the Great Barrier Reef coast.

Several publications with lessons learned from the Representative Areas Program, including on managing public submissions and communication challenges, are available at <http://bit.ly/RAPLessons>. Fernandes now runs Earth to Ocean, a consulting firm on integrated marine and coastal resource management.]

On challenges the park faced with stakeholder consultation

Genuine community participation is the foundation of effective resource management. However, it is also expensive in terms of both staff time and resources to travel to communities, especially if the intent is to sustain ongoing liaison and community involvement. In the case of the Great Barrier Reef, we were interacting with over 30 townships and about 70 Aboriginal traditional owner groups in a continuous manner for about five years during the rezoning effort. To address this resource challenge, the agency decided to stop doing some (unrelated) management tasks and reduce efforts on others to free up time to prioritize the engagement of communities on the rezoning of the marine park.

Another challenge was our initial failure to identify the need to explain the problems facing the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem - problems that required changes in management, namely through rezoning. As managers, we thought that the community would be well aware of the problems and, in many ways, they were. However, our communications strategy originally failed to explain the nature, degree, and dimensions of the problems and then link those to zoning as part of the solution. As a result, we were required, in many ways, to initiate the communication efforts anew by starting again with a discussion of the problems.

While we had so many staff in the field building partnerships with communities (up to 60 staffers at any one time), it was essential that the same messages were given to all

our stakeholders and that false expectations were not raised. To ensure this was the case, a communication strategy within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority laid out the purpose of our community participation efforts, key messages, likely questions and answers, and more. All staff who interacted with community members then participated in a training session that briefed them on all aspects of the communication strategy, including explanation of the need to avoid raising expectations in the field.

On integration of stakeholder input

In the Representative Areas Program, a lot of the consultation led to management decisions that conformed with stakeholder and community preferences and advice. Once the community understood our "boundaries" - that is, we would be protecting a minimum of 20% of each bioregion in no-take areas - many tailored their advice to us upon this basis. In a number of instances, communities gathered information from the range of interested stakeholders in their towns (e.g., recreational and commercial fishers, tour operators, conservation groups) and provided advice that was supported by all these groups. This made the manager's job easier in terms of complementing people's uses and values, as far as possible. In places where communities did not balance all the local interest groups in their provision of advice, we did that for them in the course of our decision-making.

On how the results might have differed if the role of stakeholders in planning had been more collaborative and consensus-based

If rezoning had required 100% consensus among all stakeholders and management, that could have led to a stalemate with no rezoning happening at all. Also, a co-management process such as that would have had to involve stakeholder representatives (as opposed to the community at large with all stakeholders at once). That could have been tricky. In my experience, representative bodies (and representatives of those representative bodies) don't always reflect the opinions of all their constituents and do not always effectively communicate back and forth with their constituency groups. In addition, it would have been absolutely essential to have the right stakeholder representatives at the table, and this can be very difficult to achieve depending on the diversity of opinions, and often the power plays, within each stakeholder group.

That being said, if a more co-management approach had been adopted - that is, with some degree of representative stakeholder involvement in decision-making - I think the outcomes, in terms of a management plan, may not have been that different. This is assuming that the approach would still have needed to conform with minimum requirements for no-take protection. In fact, it may well have led to an even greater sense of "ownership" of the final zoning plan than was achieved. Nonetheless, a more collaborative approach would have required a higher resource commitment (money and personnel), and that may well have been prohibitive.

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B. Applying a collaborative approach: Locally-managed marine areas in the Pacific

By Hugh Govan

[**Editor's note:** Hugh Govan is an adviser to the Locally-Managed Marine Areas Network. The LMMA Network connects people involved in community-based marine management projects across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The purpose is to share lessons and knowledge on improving local-scale management efforts (www.lmmanetwork.org). An LMMA is an area where use of resources is regulated depending on community goals, using any of a variety of management tools. Fewer than half of the sites are fully no-take. Govan's work has focused primarily on LMMAs in Fiji and more recently the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, as well as sharing the experiences regionally and internationally including in Central and South America. He co-edited *Locally-Managed Marine Areas: A Guide to Supporting Community-Based Adaptive Management*, published in 2008 www.lmmanetwork.org/resourcecenter.]

On communities' role in LMMA planning and management

In Oceania, collaboration with stakeholders is crucial for the success of the locally-managed marine area approach. In this region, local communities have strong rights (if not ownership) over marine resources, and governments are remote and poorly funded. Therefore the bulk of enforcement and management activities will fall to the local communities. In this scenario, unless the local communities feel in control of the process and outcomes, long-term engagement is unlikely. In fact in many cases, communities have taken charge of running the planning processes (usually with the support of civil society partners) and government authorities have found themselves in the "consulted" position.

Just over 10% of the 420 LMMAs in the network are in SE Asia. There government is more strongly present and more standard co-management approaches apply. Even so, building strong local partnership is crucial and this is unlikely with mere consultative processes. (Some sites in this region have tried to make up for lack of community "ownership" through the introduction of incentives to encourage stakeholders to behave in certain ways. But there is little evidence that this provides sustainable outcomes except perhaps in the rare "high value" sites - i.e., ones where income may be generated from exceptional dive sites or cruise ship revenue, for example.)

On challenges of involving stakeholders in decision-making

From my perspective as an adviser to multiple LMMA planning processes, there can be problems when making assumptions about local governance and hierarchies. In some communities, for example, it is standard practice for authorities or LMMA supporters to work with the chief and representatives of key sectors or groups (e.g., fishermen, women, youth), resulting in adequately respected management decisions. In others, however, we have found that the process needs to be much more inclusive: village-wide approaches may be required so that all community members respect and comply with the decisions that are reached. (At some sites with very low compliance, we found that some fishers had not been involved or felt that their concerns were not properly addressed by the "representatives".) In some cases, representatives of community groups or family lines may need to return to their own groups to carry on the discussions - sometimes for months or years before committing to a course of action.

Another common challenge relates to conflicts between process and product. Outside facilitators are often more interested in products such as presentable management plans or biologically sensible decisions. However, experience suggests that processes that ensure wide participation, consensus, and community ownership lead to much more (self-)enforceable management decisions. Such decisions may not necessarily look like a standard, many-paged management plan (the regulations and action items may be recorded on a single sheet of paper), but they are alive in the minds of the affected stakeholders.

On how LMMAs might look different if their management involved only consulting with stakeholders rather than collaborating with them

In the 1990s prior to creation of the LMMA Network, conservationists in the region were struggling to keep a small handful of MPAs functioning - these were sites designated in a top-down manner. If LMMAs only consulted community stakeholders on local marine management efforts, in all likelihood we would be in the same situation now as we were in the 1990s. The LMMAs would never have taken off.

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C. Recognizing when stakeholder collaboration is likely to be effective or ineffective

By Judith Layzer

[**Editor's note:** Judy Layzer is a political scientist and head of environmental policy and planning in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in the US. In her 2008 book *Natural Experiments: Ecosystem Management and the Environment* (MIT Press), Layzer examined seven cases of large-scale EBM in practice in the US. She determined that the initiatives whose goals were set in consensus-based collaboration with stakeholders produced environmental policies that were less likely to conserve ecological health than those whose goals were set through conventional policies. In other words, stakeholder collaboration in these cases led to less-effective plans - ones that featured incremental rather than meaningful change.

But her message is not that collaboration is bad and conventional management is good. In fact, she writes, collaborative processes can be effective if they are

supported by (1) a regulatory framework that is protective of resources and (2) strong pro-environmental leadership for the process. "The findings should not be construed as disparaging efforts to involve stakeholders in planning efforts," writes Layzer. "Rather, they affirm the importance of undertaking such negotiations within a hospitable context.]"

On the challenges involved in running collaborative, consensus-based processes

Proponents of collaboration often gloss over the potential tradeoffs among environmental, economic, and social considerations, particularly in the short run. They assume that long-term thinking, and a related preoccupation with ecological sustainability, will somehow emerge from a collaborative process. For this to happen, however, participants must adopt a view that healthy, functioning ecosystems are essential to human well-being. They must embrace a land ethic (or sea ethic, as the case may be) and avoid a short-run economic point of view. And that simply doesn't occur in many instances.

On framing a collaborative process to help ensure an environmentally beneficial plan

Resource managers may want to establish an environmentally protective management goal at the outset, particularly if resource pressures are intense. They may also want to devote some time to educating potential stakeholders and/or building coalitions in support of environmental protection in advance of a broader engagement process. This is so that they are not steamrolled by development interests, who tend to be intensely interested and are often politically astute.

On whether her findings would apply to cases outside the US

I do not expect that my findings would be the same in all countries, or even at all scales within the US. My findings are specific to landscape-scale initiatives in rapidly urbanizing areas. I can imagine a different set of dynamics arising in, say, a small-scale, rural collaborative initiative, particularly one in which development pressure is not intense.

The important insight to be gleaned from the particular cases I investigated is that powerful interests can dominate collaborative planning processes, and flexible implementation allows those who are not committed to evade responsibility. That being said, other researchers (such as Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues) have identified cases, many of them in the developing world, in which stakeholders work together to conserve resources. In most of those cases, strong norms exist, and pressure on resources is not severe. Such examples are becoming harder to find, however, as the global market pervades all but the most remote places.

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D. Why most public decision-making should be collaborative

By Steven Yaffee

[Editor's note: Steve Yaffee is a professor in the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan, in the US. He directs the school's Ecosystem Management Initiative (www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt). In 2000 he co-authored with Julia Wondolleck the book *Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from Innovation in Natural Resource Management* (Island Press), which analyzed 200 cases of EBM in terrestrial and freshwater systems. He and Wondolleck are now analyzing cases of stakeholder collaboration in marine EBM from around the world. Many of the cases, as well as lessons drawn from them, will be profiled on the Ecosystem Management Initiative website by the end of 2011.]

On defining "collaboration"

When I use the term collaboration, I refer to a wide range of behaviors and working arrangements that involve multiparty cooperation. These can include arrangements that result in sharing of information, work on cooperative on-the-ground projects (which comes closer to the "co-laboring" root of collaboration), or full co-management situations that involve formal shared decision-making norms.

Almost all of the arrangements we study involve the development of a shared commitment to some set of actions (small or large). This usually includes recognition of a common problem or objective, or an opportunity for joint action that can simultaneously achieve different but not conflicting objectives.

On the usefulness of collaboration

Traditional public involvement - where the agencies ask for input, take it in, and ostensibly consider it in their management choices - unfolds often as a unidirectional flow of information. It neglects much of the benefit of collaboration: face-to-face discussion and dialogue that clarifies interests, contributes new knowledge and ideas, and helps to shape creative solutions to problems that often are not produced when agencies retreat to "the mountaintop."

I believe that most public agency decision-making should be collaborative in that it should involve some level of face-to-face dialogue and problem-solving, which ultimately produces wiser and more effective management strategies. It also enlists those who are affected by decisions in problem-solving and makes it more likely that we achieve a joint sense of understanding and ownership of agency decisions. Traditional consultative processes have rarely produced this sense of joint understanding and ownership, and have often been appealed as a result.

On making decisions in collaborative processes

In most of the cases of formal collaboratives that involve decision rules, the goal is to get all the parties to feel supportive of the decision or at least to indicate they can live with the decision. Often these consensus-seeking processes have a fall-back decision rule, which may be a super-majority or more likely involves a recommendation to a decision-making authority that includes pros and cons of an alternative. But if majority rule is adopted as the only guiding norm, there can be a "tyranny of the majority" that can block honest and effective consideration of minority opinions and concerns. On the other side, if 100% support is needed to make choices, there can be a tyranny of the minority, which blocks everything they do not agree with. Consensus decision-making involves balancing the tyranny of the majority with the tyranny of the minority, and structuring effective processes that produce outcomes that avoid both of these tyrannies.

On "shared authority" vs. "shared power"

In many cases that involve public agencies or elected officials, they cannot transfer their statutory authority to a nongovernmental collaborative group. This means that these officials can participate in a collaborative as stakeholders and resources, and they can pledge to consider the outcome in agency decision-making in an open and honest way, but they cannot commit that it will be the agency decision. That would be shared authority, which often is not allowed by law.

Shared power on the other hand is allowable, where parties to a collaborative agreement share the ability to shape the agreement, and that agreement - if it develops in a scientifically and legally bounded way - will likely become the official decision (or something close to it). Collaborative processes seek to share the power to shape direction even when the agencies participating in them cannot share authority to make decisions.

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BOX: More resources on stakeholder collaboration in resource management

"Making Collaboration Work" (article). *Conservation Magazine* (Winter 2000). By Steven Yaffee and Julia Wondolleck. www.conservationmagazine.org/2008/07/making-collaboration-work/

Sharing Power: Learning by Doing in Co-Management Throughout the World(IUCN, 2004). By Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend, et al.
http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/sharing_power.pdf

FAO Guidelines: Collaborative natural resource management.
www.fao.org/docrep/008/a0032e/a0032e0c.htm

"Co-management of coral reef fisheries: A critical evaluation of the literature". *Marine Policy*(36 [2], March 2012, 481-488). By A. W. Wamukota et al. Abstract only at:
www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X11001461

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