

Communities need greater involvement in measures to protect marine environment - study

14 January 2016, by Alan Williams



The continued social acceptability of marine conservation measures could be reliant on greater engagement with the industries and stakeholders they are designed to benefit, a study suggests.

Research by Plymouth University showed [coastal communities](#) were generally supportive of the aims of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), introduced in the UK in 2013.

But that support could be enhanced by involving communities throughout the designation process, and continually informing them about the costs, benefits and management being employed.

The study, published in *Marine Policy*, was funded by the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA), and led by Sarah Gall, a PhD student in the School of Marine Science and Engineering at Plymouth University.

She said:

"When MPAs were first proposed, there was a wide level of engagement with those they were designed to benefit and, as a result, there was recognition of their aims and support for their

objectives. But in recent years that has fallen away to some extent as the communication between government and communities decreased. This study shows there is still general acceptance of the principles, and that reintroducing previous engagement could prevent communities from feeling excluded as currently appears to be the case."

The first legislation to develop a coherent network of MPAs around the UK coastline was introduced in 2009, with the aim being to protect the marine environment while enabling its sustainable use.

This study is one of the first to seek stakeholder views about MPAs' ongoing effectiveness, and participants were presented with a series of statements about their impacts.

The results identified three distinct groups who were either pro-conservation, pro-fisheries or win-win, with the latter group believing the current approach to marine management would allow both fisheries and conservation goals to be met.

The win-win and pro-conservation groups were most similar in their views, believing the environment should be prioritised over any commercial interests, while pro-fisheries respondents held some scepticism over whether MPAs would work due to limited resources with which to implement and enforce their objectives.

However, all the groups felt that the switch to a process that was almost entirely top-down – rather than being driven by the [communities](#) themselves, as had been the original intention – had resulted in the exclusion of local stakeholders and a loss of social acceptability.

Tim Robbins, Chief Officer of the Devon and

Severn IFCA, said:

"The findings from this study reinforce the belief of the Devon & Severn IFCA that consultation with all parties is the key to developing balanced management solutions which will deliver greater protection of the marine environment for the benefit of all."

More information: Sarah C. Gall et al. Evaluating the social acceptability of Marine Protected Areas, *Marine Policy* (2016). DOI: [10.1016/j.marpol.2015.12.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2015.12.004)

Provided by University of Plymouth

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