

The Social Dimension of Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management

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The pressing environmental issues of our times have clearly demonstrated that biological, physical, technical, social and economic systems are not independent, but rather, interdependent. In fact, the very nature of ecosystem based modeling is interdisciplinary. And while ecosystem based management techniques have already been used in wildlife and natural resource conservation plans, it is a fairly new approach for fisheries management. In order for ecosystem based fisheries management to be effective, it is essential that social elements and dynamic human relationships and needs are considered as part of ecosystem models, and that this be done from the very beginning of the management process.

People are both actors and reactors in their environments and they can create change and also be changed by political, social, economic and biological factors. It is imperative that human needs, concerns, and impacts (both positive and negative) be investigated and incorporated into the management process from the onset, and with input from all stakeholder groups to insure effectiveness of, and increased compliance to, marine policies and regulations (Kaplan, 2000, 2002; Kaplan and Kite-Powell, 2000; Kaplan and McCay, 2003; and Kaplan and Maharaj, 2004). Kaplan and Maharaj (2004) have proposed management recommendations with some modifications given here:

1. Monitor and evaluate socio-cultural and economic interactions that exist before implementation of a management plan, and assess impacts that would occur as a result of an ecosystem based fisheries management plan—**with direct links to the political decision-making process that are transparent to stakeholders.**
2. Include a wide range of stakeholder expertise that reflects **diversity** not only of natural resources, but of the fishing community as well. **Environmental justice** and **cumulative impact** considerations must also be part of the process.
3. Examine case studies of fishing communities to gain a better understanding of the **depth, breadth and diversity** of fishing activities and the associated social and economic activities.
4. **Improve communication** among different agencies at the federal level, between state and federal agencies and between government and stakeholders and allow for **participation of stakeholder groups that is seen as effective.**

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