

‘Invest in Fish South West: Exploring Partnership in a Multi-Stakeholder Fisheries Project in the UK’

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ABSTRACT:

The increasing move to citizen participation in policy formulation is being witnessed in European fisheries. The emergence of the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) and other processes via the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is sparking hope and interest in more regionally relevant, holistic, and hopefully workable fisheries management measures. In the SW of England, an initiative is underway to achieve consensus amongst disparate stakeholder groups on long term management measures which will sustain fisheries, the regional economies, and the seas on which they depend. This project is now sufficiently advanced to provide some reflection on the nature of this partnership.

INTRODUCTION:

‘What is needed now is a holistic vision that people from the full range of interest groups can support, comprising the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the business of catching, selling and eating fish’. [1]

The Invest in Fish South West project was born from recognition that single sector attempts to influence fisheries policy was not effective, and that only by working together could truly useful policy reform be accomplished. Using the platform of a WWF report, *‘Choose or Lose’*, which called for a multi-stakeholder long range planning process to assess costs and benefits of alternative ways of managing fisheries, a core group of organizationsⁱ got together to devise a strategy for a new way of working. The Invest in Fish process was the result; the southwest of England was the logical place to start.

England’s southwest: rolling green hills and quaint villages with thatched stone cottages; aquamarine coves and charming fishing harbours filled with colorful boats and activity. This setting is a prime holiday spot (and second home hub) for British and foreign tourists, many of whom participate in seaside activities such as angling, nature observation and boating, all of which increasingly contribute to the regional economy. For many locals, with hundreds of years of fishing heritage, the sustainability of the region depends, however, on ongoing access to high value commercial fisheries, which is largely exported to European marketsⁱⁱ, and the underlying sustainability of the resource that this requires.

Commercial fishing in the southwest is a tradition dating back many hundreds of years, with knowledge, skills, and access rights passed down through generations. The southwest fishing fleet is today made up of slightly more than 1000 vessels, with more than 70% under 10 metres. Overall, the fleet is ageing as is the average age of fishermen. Fishing and associated upstream and downstream activities make a relatively small contribution to the regional economy as a whole in terms of employment and GDP, yet many coastal communities remain reliant on the industry for jobs, and many more throughout the region attach importance to a shared cultural heritage and identityⁱⁱⁱ. With over 3000 people directly or indirectly employed in commercial fishing [2], the tensions surrounding competing use as well as concerns over the status of some fish stocks makes commercial fishing both high profile and contentious; further complicated by the close proximity of foreign vessels fishing for quota in nearby waters.

The project area covers the southwest of England up to the Wessex coast and those waters primarily fished by boats from this region: ICES regions VIIe-j or the Celtic Sea, Western Approaches, and Western Channel (see figure 1)^{iv}.

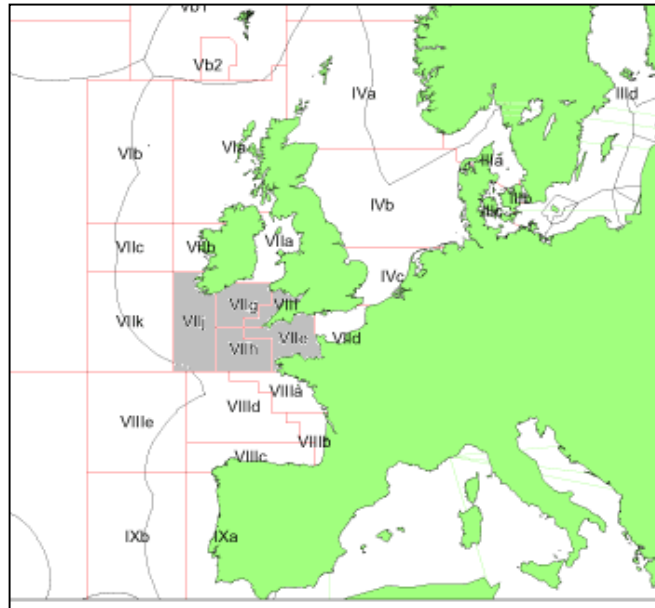


Figure 1: Invest in Fish South West Area

PARTNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

The Invest in Fish South West partnership emerged in 2003 as an innovative attempt to bring together diverse stakeholders^v ranging from commercial fishermen, processors, and recreational anglers, to retailers, environmental NGOs, statutory agencies, and restaurateurs^{vi} to tackle the issue of declining commercial fish stocks. Never before in the UK had such a diverse group decided to work together with the single minded objective of agreeing a strategy for the long term sustainable future of the fishing industry in the southwest which did not compromise the marine environment or the regional economy.

A partnership is a relationship situated in a context of wider networks of relationships, involving some level of ‘contract’, which may not necessarily be ideal or even equal [3]. Effective partnering requires commitment to a common goal, the existence and building of trust, as well as time and other resources; multi-sector partnerships especially so. LiFSW sits as a formal partnership between twelve organizations, representing eight very different sectors, each with equal voice, and organized into a project steering group (see figure 2). Final decision making on a set of recommendations (the principal output) occurs at the level of the steering group, however, each SG member acts as a conduit in exchanging information and representing views to/from their sector^{vii}.

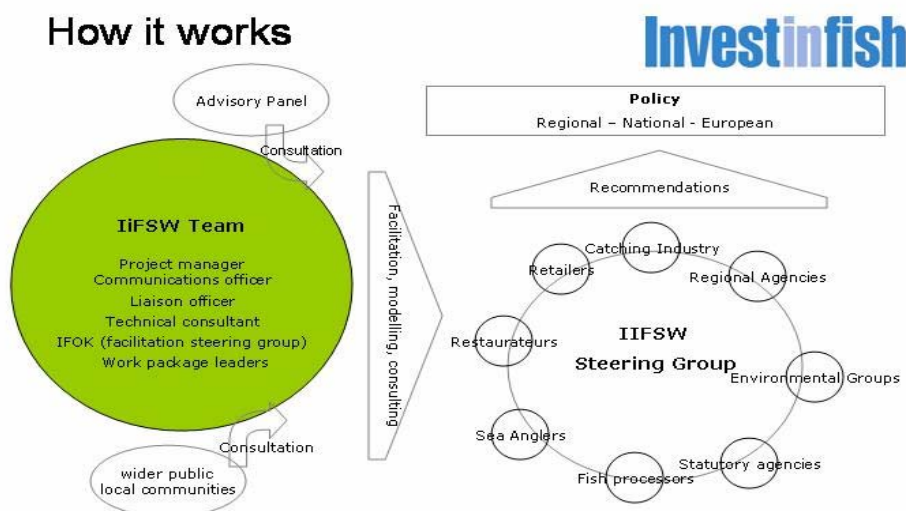


Figure 2: Project Structure

The inclusion of restaurateurs and retailers in this collaboration in particular - bringing attention to the full supply chain from 'fin to plate' - is a significant first for multi-stakeholder fisheries partnerships in the UK. Other features of the steering group include the absence of the government department for fisheries, (Defra) a principal funder^{viii} and stakeholder. This decision was based on the potential power imbalance their presence might create, especially in the early stages^{ix}. Also noteworthy is the place of science not as the central node in the project, but as one tool in a chest of tools for supporting stakeholders' decision making. Thus the project has not been 'brought to town and rolled out', but emerged from the key stakeholders in the region. 'Agency' remains rooted in the partnership, while science – including professional facilitation – is a contracted service. These decisions all have political and power dimensions and it's hoped the recommendations will be more readily accepted by constituencies as a result.

In the 2005 Forum for the Future report, Porritt notes, '*Invest in Fish is a significant initiative precisely because of its inclusivity. It is building trust between different groups that in the past have been at loggerheads, and it is trying to improve the science of fisheries management at the same time*'. [4]

Apart from the steering group, there are 3 major categories of participants in the project:

(i) a project team, comprised of both staff and external consultants hired to provide technical and administrative support (including facilitation/process support); (ii) an expert advisory panel, comprised of international experts in varying aspects of fisheries management; and, (iii) a feed in loop for general 'publics' or 'communities' of the southwest.

PROJECT PROCESS:

The project is designed around three phases: listening and gathering information, evaluation of fisheries management options, and establishing the best ways forward. This has been broken out into five key areas of work:

- Technical data on the socioeconomics, biology, and ecology of the Cornish and South West England fisheries. This includes technical collaboration with Ireland, Spain, and France;
- Development of a transparent, integrated assessment tool – the bio-economic model – to evaluate the costs and benefits of the options generated through the consultations and based on the data collected.
- Development of fisheries management options through extensive consultations. A community liaison officer works as a bridge between interest groups and technical experts, and assists stakeholders with their articulation of preferred options.
- Evaluation of the fisheries management options and agreement on the preferred options for the region. This involves not only a technical discussion, but an overall consultative process for dealing with uncertainty, risk, and disagreement. Options generated may have social and cultural implications for the wider community, and these implications must be considered and discussed.
- Communications within and between interest groups. This is essential as understanding and trust must be built and maintained if the project is to develop meaningful solutions. It is also essential for building support in the local community and beyond. This will enhance the prospect for subsequent implementation.

The project is now nearing the end of phase 2 with modeling and sector consultations underway. A meta-list of management options has been generated through extensive consultations, and where suitable are being analyzed by the bio-economic model to calculate likely impacts on fish stocks, profitability of fisheries, and so on. Where modeling is not the answer, other tools are being explored.

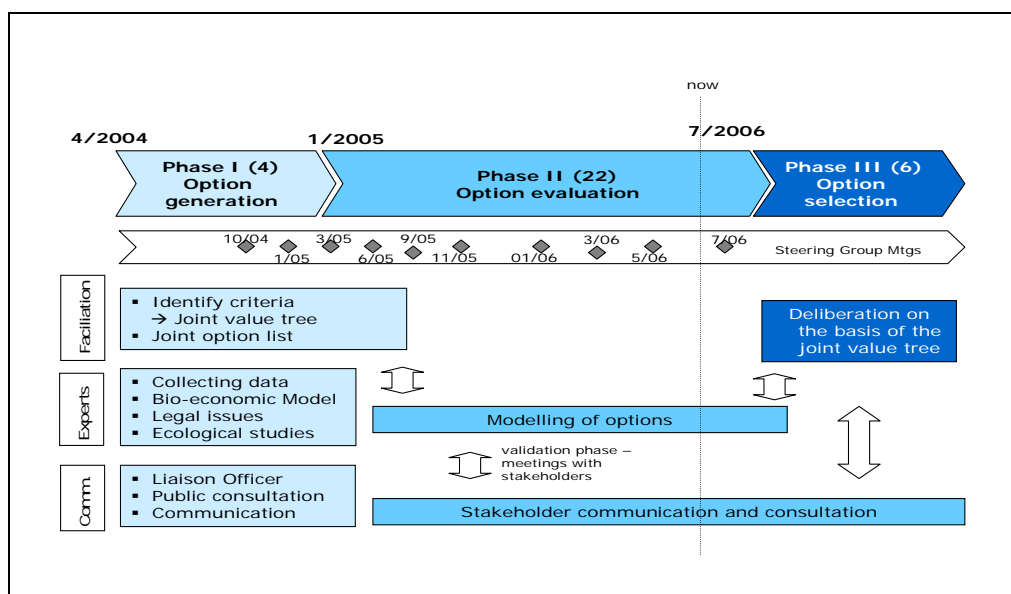


Figure 3: IiFSW Process Status July '06

PROCESS TENSIONS

Charles et al notes *'Although the differences between sectors is a source of strength in multi-sector partnerships, they are the source of particular challenges. Bringing together organizations with diverse goals, values, and perspectives means there is plenty of ground for disputes and conflicts. Therefore, creating multi-sector partnerships requires building structures, skills, and processes that can use the differences to encourage exchange and creativity'* [5]

Formal operating rules are critical in multi-sector partnerships, as both accountability and equity can be so easily challenged. IiFSW has developed an extensive set of guidance documents related to functioning of the partnership. For joint decision making the *Rules for Deliberation* and the *Shared Values Statement* are especially valuable.

Focus on Values and Negotiation

Fisher and Ury note that good agreements focus on the parties' interests or values, rather than their positions. Defining a problem in terms of position means that at least one party will 'lose' the dispute, but by defining a problem in terms of the parties underlying values or interests it is often possible to find a solution which satisfies the different interests [6].

The Invest in Fish project is following a weighted value tree process. Each sector worked with a professional facilitator to articulate their values related to the problem at hand (SW fisheries sustainability). Joint workshops followed where the areas of overlap were discussed and eventually agreed amongst the different groups (see figure 4). Each value was also broken down by sub-criteria and weighting agreed.

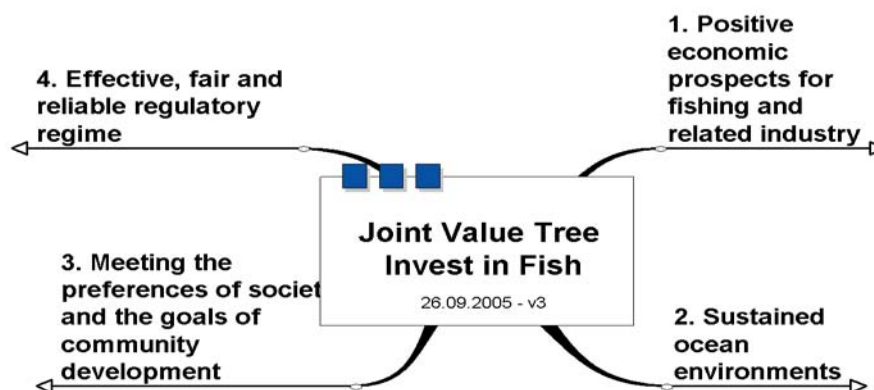


Figure 4: Joint Value Tree Summary

The four shared pillars emerged organically from exploring the areas of overlap between each sectors' values, and though not explicitly defined by the stakeholders, they do in their entirety create a basic framework for sustainable development^x. This is a significant accomplishment for such a mixed group, and the results have already helped with mutual understanding, but should be especially useful when the negotiations get underway.

In traditional bargaining, the name of the game is 'positioning', with groups aligning their positions at the start and often trenching themselves into deadlock positions. The IiF process is attempting a version of 'principled negotiation' which involves: 1) separating people from the problem, 2) focusing on interests (or values) rather than positions, 3) generating a variety of options before settling on an agreement, and 4) insisting that the

agreement is based on objective criteria [7][8]. This is for many at the table a new way of working, and hopefully will lead to a useful agreement, one which is perceived as fair, lasting, and efficient, and which satisfies each parties' interests, as well as hopefully improving their relationships. Once the options and strategy are decided, they will be set out in a report which will include a projection of associated costs and benefits over time and any short-term investment required for implementation (along with estimates of the various uncertainties).

Who's Knowledge Counts?

Within any multi-sector debate there is dispute over what constitutes 'truth'. Each of the major stakeholder groups involved in Invest in Fish have their own formal position on a host of issues related to fisheries management, which may or may not jive with the personal views of representatives at the Invest in Fish table, and almost certainly does not jive with other sectors in the partnership. Their positions are often based on interpretations of science that bode well for their particular agenda. Wilson highlights that there is no such thing as objective knowledge, even in the scientific community and especially when applied to policy, and that there is a central tension between science and citizen participation [9].

Finding common ground, or at least the space to discuss our underlying assumptions, is the remit of Invest in Fish. Issues of agreed expertise comes to life via the project's bio-economic model: At least a partial justification for using bio-economic modeling was to equip the partnership with the same language/tools which policy makers use to make decisions affecting fisheries. Thus by advancing what's on offer for modeling relevant waters and economics, it's reasoned that stakeholders will have more effective dialogue with government policy makers. This is no easy feat, however, and the challenge is ensuring that the scientific tools are also credible and understood by the large and diverse stakeholders that the project represents^{xi}. The importance of this has strengthened over time, and the project has devoted more time, effort, and other resources to verifying data accuracy with fishers, anglers and others, as well as providing a reasonable amount of model validation or ground-truthing to the different stakeholder groups.

Sean Pascoe, Director of CEMARE and Professor of Natural Resource Economics at the University of Portsmouth, notes that *'No previous model development has... had the direct involvement of such a wide range of stakeholder and interest groups. The resulting model will form a common framework over which the impacts of management options on the different groups can be explicitly measured, allowing consensus to be built on real information rather than supposition'* [10]

This mode of working carries over to other science work packages, and places the project in a context of science-community partnership. This is further articulated in the context of dealing with uncertainty.

Dealing with Uncertainty

Joint decision making in fisheries, where much is unknown about the state of ecosystem interactions and many other aspects of the biophysical world, requires dealing headlong with issues of uncertainty. In a project like Invest in Fish, this is compounded by different types of expert knowledge, ranging from the local to the scientific. The result for stakeholder groups can be immobilizing or it can be empowering. One further example related to the bio-economic illustrates:

The stakeholder groups and the bio-economic model require information on the impacts of fishing gear technologies on the marine environment; this type of data is highly contentious for the reasons listed. Few studies have been done into the long term effects of different gears, and fundamentally different opinion exists amongst some stakeholders as to the basic epistemology of what is considered 'nature' or 'natural'. Many environmentalists, and some scientists, debate the précis of 'man vs. nature' against 'man in nature' and this leads to different views on what – or even 'if' – there is such a thing as an equilibrium state for 'the natural world'. Is humankind a part of, or separate from, natural systems? And in a context of centuries of fishing activity, at what point in time do we choose as the ideal representation of what a natural system should look like? In a well trawled sandy substrate with frequent tidal action, for example, some argue that the system

operates much like a productive farmer's field, regularly producing harvestable fisheries bio-mass, and that this is entirely' natural'^{xii}.

Wilson notes that 'if collaborative fisheries science is going to work we have to recognize and accept the reality that people, often using similar sets of facts, construct different pictures of nature' [11]. The resolution for Invest in Fish into the quagmire on gear impacts was to commission work that surveyed 'expert opinion' on the relative impacts of gear technologies on different environmental substrates, using four discrete groups of 'expertise'^{xiii}. These 'expert groups' were: (1) commercial fishermen, (2) recreational users of the sea, (3) environmentalists, and (4) scientists. Each was asked to rank their relative knowledge of different fishing gears, and their opinion on environmental impacts from these gears on discrete environmental conditions. The work provided much opportunity for qualitative feedback, and has been taken a further step at the steering group as sectors request further opportunity to formally comment on the study results. In this way, the study acts as an opportunity for dialogue, not as a conclusive acceptance of only one world view. Various other examples of dealing with uncertainty, as well as competing knowledge claims, can be found within the Invest in Fish or any multi-stakeholder fisheries project.

Recognizing Power.

Using Arnstein's ladder of participation (figure 6), the different groups engage with differing degrees of agency, or ability to effect change (ie. power) [12]. To understand participation we must understand power and the ability of different groups to achieve what they want. The steering group members sit as a central partnership, with the relative power that this evokes^{xiv}, with feedback loops to their constituencies through a range of participatory tools. Participation from sector members to the steering group is at the level of consultation, though in some instances is purely information flow. The project team, advisory panel, and consultancies for scientific work packages feed into this structure through informing and supporting the steering group and its constituencies.

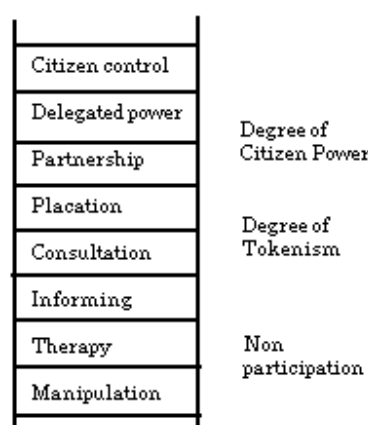


Figure 6: Ladder of Participation and Citizen Empowerment (Chambers).

What this means for each individual steering group sector (commercial fisheries, recreational fishing, etc.) is that the extra work, time - and sometimes significant political risk - from being in the partnership must be outweighed by the benefits. In the overall structure each sector formally sits equal to the other, but in reality - with external events and changing dynamics (including personalities at the table) - there are always tensions and the negotiating of informal power. At any one time, pressures can tip to make the participation of any one sector contentious.

Within the context of Invest in Fish Southwest, various external events periodically threaten the optimum functioning of the partnership, though to date sufficient trust or circumstance has always saved the day. This becomes more difficult, however, when the partnership is making bold statements – as may well occur in coming months when the options lead to recommendations. Issues which at times have threatened to polarize stakeholders within the partnership include: the UK's emergent Marine Bill, specifically the degree of legislatively forced protected areas that may emerge; the Defra MLS bass consultation; and the recent Brixham exclusive de-commissioning scheme announced by Defra. There is no getting away from these and other immediate issues, and the Invest in Fish partners do disagree on many things. However, in focusing on the long term and by providing a discussion forum it's hoped that project partners can find ways to listen and learn, and that the built up levels of trust do pay off^{xv}.

Time Stands Still for No One – the Broader Context

The idea of citizen participation in fisheries management is now widely accepted [13], and various projects are underway in different parts of Europe in line with the Commissions' calls for more stakeholder involvement and regional management devices [14]^{xvi}. Practically speaking, most attention and hope rests with the new RACs^{xvii}, transnational cross-sector advisory bodies covering a region of European waters or a key concern^{xviii}. While still in their early days^{xix}, early signs are that some at least are making progress. While their decision-making power is limited by their advisory nature, there are signs that the Commission is taking them seriously. The SW fish producer organizations (PO leaders) have been very active in discussions with their counterparts in Spain and France, and the North Western Waters (NWW) RAC is now off the ground and functioning, with Cornish fisherman (and IiFSW Chair) Sam Lambourn chairing.

In the context of Invest in Fish South West, this is an interesting development. An initial motivation for coming together into a partnership was the limited access to political influence by each of the stakeholder groups in isolation. By linking, and by using credible scientific tools relied on by government (bio-economic modeling et al) it was felt that a joined-up group could have more influence. But with the RACs there are now players at the Invest in Fish table with different positions in the broader policy arena. The RACs have allocated seating for both commercial fishing and environmental NGOs, but the power balance does appear to rest with the fishing industry. With all individuals representing commercial fishing at the IiF steering group also sitting at RAC tables there is the potential for greater awareness and enhanced legitimacy of IiFSW – and the RACs are clearly seen as the appropriate place for IiFSW outcomes and modeling tools - but there is also the possibility of informal power shifts with commercial fish representatives now having opportunity to participate in a higher profile game elsewhere^{xx}. This has the potential to affect willingness to actively participate and negotiate at the Invest in Fish table.

The RACs are clearly a positive development overall, however, their full impact on the IiF process is not yet known. Other policy developments, such as the UK's emerging Marine Bill – with its likely endorsement of a network of marine protected areas in the UK – gives additional legitimacy to the environmentalists priority of marine protected areas, which will also play out at the Invest in Fish table. There are interesting times a head.

CONCLUSION:

In response to a history of expert and state-control, participatory natural resource management seeks to support new forms of managerial practice that moves beyond top-down control by extending managerial communities and expanding the definition of legitimate knowledge [15],[16] [17]. If the 2002 CFP reforms are to translate into greater co-management, further support for initiatives like Invest in Fish South West will be needed. In the fullness of time, an appropriate review of the tensions and processes articulated here will need to be conducted to reveal if and how creativity and cooperation has been mobilized. Lessons learned, along with the actual policy recommendations, will need translation into a commitment for reform which includes local communities and sector interests, as well as institutional reforms that allow their constructive participation. Boldness to experiment will be key.

For further information on Invest in Fish South West or the process so far contact Heather Squires, Project Manager, IiFSW, Boswednan Farm Penzance U.K. TR20 8UA. hsquires@investinfishsw.org.uk, www.investinfish.org

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Endnotes:

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- ⁱ WWF-UK, Marks and Spencer plc., and NFFO (National Federation of Fishermen's Organizations).
- ⁱⁱ Over 90% of SW fish is shipped out for export outside the SW, the majority to the Mediterranean (SWRDA figures).
- ⁱⁱⁱ The project started off with wide-ranging consultation with local people to collect their views on the role of the fishing industry, and this research found a surprising amount of support for the industry and the communities that have grown up around it, and also awareness of the problems facing it, including concern for the health of the marine environment.
- ^{iv} These waters are also fished by adjacent nation states, especially Spain, France, and Ireland. Some transnational neighbours did participate in initial scoping workshops, however, funding restrictions and a desire to maintain a southwest focus for this first pilot has limited their inclusion to information sharing, including for the modeling.
- ^v This refers to those with a significant stake in the region's fisheries, including its relationship to the marine environment and/or communities.
- ^{vi} The steering group consists of representatives from CFPO and SWFPO (the region's two major fisher representative associations), NFFO, WWF-UK, English Nature, Cornwall and Devon Wildlife Trusts, the National Federation of Sea Anglers, Marks & Spencer plc., Moshi Moshi (sushi bars), Falfish (fish processors), and the SWRDA (regional development association).
- ^{vii} The strategies for effective stakeholder consultation are not dealt with here.
- ^{viii} Via administration of FIG structural funds.
- ^{ix} Defra's support by way of technical advice, when requested, logistical support etc. has been valuable.
- ^x Though not explicitly referenced in language, notions of sustainable development and ecosystem management are at the core of the IiFSW dialogue.
- ^{xi} Ultimately it is hoped that the IiF model will become a practical tool for stakeholder groups, to increase their ability to explore options outside of this project. The principal remit, however, is to influence policy, and so opportunities to further the model as an educational tool are being explored separately.
- ^{xii} Albeit there are always tipping points at which systems fail, though others would argue that even then systems eventually self-regulate. If fisheries continually collapse, however, we may be left with plenty of bio-mass, though not the species we would like to see – which some would argue is an issue of subjective value, not science.
- ^{xiii} A similar study on a bigger scale was commissioned in the U.S. a few years ago by the Pew Foundation, though this surveyed fewer 'expert' groups, just fishermen and scientists.
- ^{xiv} Further elaboration on the Arnstein model is provided by Chambers and others; in particular, highlighting the change in relationships, actions, and ownership that accompanies more control as groups move up or down the ladder.
- ^{xv} As the saying goes, *'As long as you're talking, you can't be shooting!'*
- ^{xvi} Recent or ongoing work includes CEVIS (evaluating alternative, participatory management models for EU fisheries), EFIMAS, and the recently completed: The North Sea Fisheries Ecosystem Plan.
- ^{xvii} Regional Advisory Councils
- ^{xviii} The majority are spatially based, such as the North Western Waters RAC, though there are some which will advise on specific fisheries (Pelagics RAC) or broader issues (Deep Sea RAC).
- ^{xix} The 1st RAC to get operational is the North Sea RAC, which is a little more than a year old.
- ^{xx} Until recently, one of the environmental NGO representatives at the IiF table also occupied a seat at a RAC, however, this individual is no longer participating.