Changes in Australian fisheries: what can Social Impact Assessment tell us?
A synthesis of three recent assessments

Julia Pickworth and Anne Maree Casey

Science for decision makers

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY
Overview

• Fisheries context and the role of social factors
• Case studies: 3 recent Social Impact Assessments (SIA)
• Challenges of SIA in fishing sector
• Themes and lessons from case studies
• Where does SIA fit?
• Conclusions
Context of change

Fishing is important for the Australian community
– Direct employment and income
– Flow-on benefits

Changes affecting fishing
– Increasing pressures and competition
– Evolving market conditions and technologies
Understanding social system is important

- How change is experienced and managed by fishing communities
- Understanding drivers of change and people’s motivations and values…
  - Provides insights into changing social well-being
  - Informs decision-making
Social Impact Assessment

Involves looking at things such as:

- Dependent communities
- Quality of life and social resilience
- Contributions of fishing
- Values, attitudes and beliefs
- Implications for future management options
Three case studies

1. Social assessment of the South Australian Marine Scalefish Fishery (MSF)
2. Social assessment of commercial fishing in the East Gippsland region of Victoria
3. Socio-economic impact assessment of the proposed Cod Grounds Marine Protected Area, NSW
Challenges of SIA in the fishing sector

A) Importance of context

B) Lack of available social data
C) Identifying and including all parts of the fishing community
Themes and lessons

- Synthesis of three case studies
- Insights into changes in Australian fishing
- Role of SIA in better managing change
#1 Motivations and attitudes guide responses

- Many fishers choose to fish for social, rather than economic, reasons

- Motivations and attitudes important in understanding responses to changes
  - Cod Grounds: fishers keen to stay in fishing
#2 Different groups, different impacts

Diversity between, and within, fisheries

- Various groups within the MSF
  - Different licence classes
  - Older participants
  - Women
  - New entrants
- Cod Grounds: diversity affects responses
#3 Incremental and cumulative impacts an important gap

- SIA mostly focus on external, explicit shocks or changes

- Importance of incremental and cumulative impacts
  - Most MSF fishers report access and regulation changes reduced business viability
  - Can have unintended consequences
  - Intersecting management regimes a particular issue
#4 Impacts of uncertainty

- Uncertainty about future access impacts on fishers, their families and communities
  - 65% of MSF participants would not encourage young people to enter the fishery, citing lack of security
  - Many feel politically vulnerable, increasing uncertainty
#5 Process is important

- Open, transparent and inclusive management processes likely to:
  - create more effective decision-making
  - improve compliance
  - address disenfranchisement

- Most MSF fishers reported:
  - ‘fair and consistent management of the fishery’ as important
  - dissatisfaction with the fairness of decisions and rules set by government on how they can operate
Where does SIA fit?

- SIA can identify:
  - range of values
  - key groups
  - options

- Most effective when:
  - brought in early
  - a tool for managing change…
  - as well as ‘counting’ change
Conclusions

• SIA is:
  – a valuable tool in management decisions
  – especially if undertaken early in the decision-making process.

• SIA can:
  – increase understanding of the values associated with an activity … and likely responses to proposed changes
  – help managers move forward from counting change to managing change
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Further information

Full copies of the reports are available on the BRS website at www.brs.gov.au/socialsciences

If you have any comments or would like further information, please contact us at:

Socialsciences@brs.gov.au

Ph: 02 6272 4282