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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ENGLISH NATURE (MARITIME TEAM)

An analysis of partnership approaches to achieve strategic marine conservation objectives and of the perspectives of different actors on such approaches

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Aims

The study aims to address the following questions in the context of inshore marine nature conservation initiatives in England:-

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to addressing collective action problems through local partnerships in order to achieve strategic objectives?
- What are the different perspectives on such approaches and problems amongst different actors?

Objectives

- To evaluate the effectiveness of different partnership models amongst relevant actors for the management of marine special areas of conservation (MSACs);
- To explore the perspectives of different actors on these different approaches and the related issues in order to assess the key tensions and opportunities.

Policy Context

The conservation of marine sites is a recent policy challenge arising from the EC's Habitats Directive (1992), which requires the designation of sites of international importance for biodiversity conservation, including marine special areas of conservation (MSACs) for listed marine habitats and species. Prior to the EC Habitats Directive (1992) and the UK Regulations (1994) that transpose them, there were only 3 small statutory marine nature reserves in the UK, augmented by an *ad hoc* network of voluntary marine nature reserves (Jones 1999). By contrast, 68 marine Special Areas of Conservation (MSACs) with an approximate total area of 1.5 million ha are currently being pursued in the UK.

The regulations for MSACs represent a challenge in that they rely primarily on the voluntary cooperation of stakeholders, national policy guidance (DETR 1998) stating that statutory enforcement should only be employed on a back-up basis, but the maintenance of the favourable conservation status of MSAC features is a statutory duty to the EC. Similarly, relevant authorities (RAs) are encouraged by policy guidance to work together on a partnership basis to manage MSACs, including providing for the participation of stakeholders, but no one RA has executive powers to direct other RAs, such powers being available only to the Secretary of State on a back-up basis. The management of MSACs therefore relies primarily on voluntary cooperation and partnerships amongst RAs and stakeholders, through which strategic, statutory commitments to the EC must be fulfilled. As such, this policy area represents an opportunity to explore the tensions between bottom-up and top-down institutions and different ways of managing these tensions in order to achieve strategic objectives through local partnerships and the promotion of cooperation.

The proposed study will also support policy initiatives at national, European and international levels. English Nature is currently developing a Maritime Strategy, which is likely to include proposals for expanding England's network of marine protected areas (MPAs) beyond the 19 MSACs currently being pursued, including sites of national importance. Their management will also rely largely on partnership approaches, which are themselves also likely to be an important theme in the Maritime Strategy. At an EU level, the assessment of different approaches to developing management partnerships for SACs will make an important contribution to the implementation of the Habitats Directive. At an international level, the 5th IUCN World Parks Congress (September 2003) recommended that stakeholder participation in protected area management be promoted through the strengthening of collaborative management frameworks. Furthermore, the IUCN guidelines (in press) for evaluating MPA management effectiveness include five governance indicators, analyses employing which will be supported by the findings of the proposed study.

Theoretical Context

The proposed study will draw and build on the work of a number of workers who are also addressing these questions, including Ostrom (1998, 1999), concerning the use of local partnerships to achieve strategic objectives by overcoming collective action problems; Goodwin (1998, 1999) and Pennington and Rydin/Rydin and Pennington (2000), concerning social capital and the development of incentive structures to overcome such problems; and Jones and Burgess (2005), concerning the potential of different partnership models to achieve strategic objectives; as well as the developing literature on the potential of collaborative management approaches for protected area management (*eg* Borrini-Feyerabend 1999). It also addresses a key gap in the literature concerning the empirical testing of arguments on the merits of environmental governance approaches in different case study contexts.

This proposal specifically builds on recent work (Jones et al. 2001, Jones and Burgess 2005) that involved a preliminary evaluation of different approaches for promoting RA and stakeholder participation in MSACs in the UK. This study drew on the concept of social capital and analysed the development of different governance models for developing partnership capacity amongst RAs and stakeholders in different contexts. It involved fifteen case studies, through which some approaches were identified which have been developed to provide for the participation of RAs and stakeholders which would appear to be effective in establishing effective partnerships for MSAC management. However, this evaluation was at an early stage in the process, when the management schemes were still being formulated. The issues emerging from the use of different partnership approaches to effectively manage MSACs remain to be investigated, particularly the views of different actors on the potential of different approaches for the management of tensions between different perspectives. The proposal also builds on recent work (Jones 2001) which contrasts top-down and bottom-up perspectives on MPAs and considers the potential to pursue a 'middle ground' post-normal approach.

Methodology

The proposed questions will be addressed through case studies involving 2-3 MSACs in England. These will be selected from amongst the 9 case studies for English MSACs undertaken by Jones at al. (2001) in order that the findings from these preliminary analysis can be drawn and built upon. The initial phase of the research will involve an analysis of the developments and current status of these 9 MSACs involving discussions with English Nature staff in order to provide for the identification of 2-3 case studies which are comparable and will provide good contexts for addressing the above questions.

The 2-3 in-depth case studies will involve a programme of semi-structured interviews with a representative range of actors for each MSAC. The semi-structure employed will be developed by a thorough analysis of the theoretical and policy issues through literature reviews and discussions with English Nature project officers, and will be further developed by issues which emerge during the programme of interviews. This will enable flexible but in-depth and rigorous analyses of the issues related to the above questions for each case study, including consideration of the differences between case studies and amongst different actors, and the influence of any differences in context. The interview findings will be 'triangulated' with information gleaned from grey and published literature in order to provide for informed and cross-referenced analyses. The concept of social capital, including the use of appropriate incentive structures and the role of the state in partnerships, will be employed to assess the effectiveness of different approaches to developing constructive partnerships amongst RAs and stakeholders. The application, adaptation and refinement of this methodology to explore the above questions and thus to promote further empirical analyses of environmental governance approaches in different contexts will also be an important contribution to the field.

Outcomes

The project will support and contribute to a partnership project in which English Nature is involved to apply and test the IUCN MPA effectiveness indicators. In particular, it will provide further information on the issues underlying the indicators of effective stakeholder participation and thus support their development and application. It will also support the implementation of English Nature's Maritime Strategy through the identification of good practice in promoting partnerships to achieve strategic objectives, on which the new strategy will significantly rely.

The project will also make an important contribution to the literature on the issues underlying the use of partnerships to overcome collective action problems and achieve strategic objectives, moving beyond simply considering the level of stakeholder empowerment. It will contribute to discussions based on empirical studies of these issues, as well as contributing to the development of methodologies for further such studies.

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