OVERVIEW

Debates surrounding governance strategies for marine protected areas (MPAs) have to date largely focused on top-down, bottom-up or market-based approaches. Whilst co-management approaches for governing MPAs are widely accepted as a way forward for combining these three strategies, many interpretations of this concept exist and it is applied in many different ways to MPAs in different contexts. This study aimed to explore governance through a case-study approach based on a specifically developed empirical framework – the marine protected area governance (MPAG) analysis framework – to increase understanding of how to combine the three governance approaches. A dialogue with MPA practitioners in 20 case studies helped shape the MPAG analysis framework as it developed, and an international workshop was held on ‘Governing MPAs’, bringing the practitioners together to compare results and further develop the framework. The first paper in this special issue provides an overview of the topic and research methodology and introduces the case studies (Jones, De Santo, Qiu and Vestergaard, 2013).

Drawing on the 20 MPAG case studies, 15 of which are presented as papers in this special issue, the discussion paper argues that MPAs worldwide are facing increasing driving forces, which represent a major and increasing challenge for MPA governance.
OVERVIEW CONT’D.

The Marine Protected Area Governance (MPAG) project examined a range of different incentives – economic, interpretative, knowledge, legal and participative – employed to address the driving forces and promote effectiveness in 20 case studies across the globe. The discussion paper argues that, regardless of the MPA governance approach adopted (i.e. government-led, decentralised, private or community-led), resilience in MPA governance systems derives from employing a diversity of inter-connected incentives, with legal incentives providing reinforcement against the potentially perturbing effects of driving forces that could undermine the effective governance of MPAs. The significance of institutional diversity to governance systems parallels that of species diversity to ecosystems, conferring resilience to the overall social-ecological system (see figures at left).

It is concluded that, in the face of strong driving forces, rather than relying on particular types of incentives and institutions, it is important to recognise that the key to resilience is diversity, both of species in ecosystems and of institutions in governance systems (Jones, Qiu and De Santo, 2013).

The MPAG analytical framework was launched at the second International Marine Protected Area Congress (IMPAC2) in Washington DC in May 2009. International Marine Protected Area practitioners and experts were invited to a workshop in October 2009 hosted by the Blue World Institute and supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This workshop focused on case study development and analysis, and resulted in a UNEP technical report published in 2011.

Figures at left: (a) Food web complexity (adapted from Polis (1998) Nature 395, 744-745), and (b) web of incentives, illustrating the strong (thick) and weak (thin) interconnections between different incentives.
List of Papers (direct link to entire special issue)