Final Report to: -

English Nature (UK Marine SACs Project)

An evaluation of approaches for promoting relevant authority and stakeholder participation in European Marine Sites in the UK

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Report Overview

Introduction

This document reports the findings of a project, commissioned as part of the *UK Marine SACs Project*, to evaluate different approaches employed to provide for Relevant Authority (RA) and stakeholder participation in European Marine Sites (EMSs). These findings are based on 15 case studies which were informed primarily by interviews conducted with EMS project officers over June-July 1999. Telephone interviews with a small sample of RAs and stakeholders were also carried out for four case studies in order to gain wider views on the participation approaches employed.

The aims and objectives of this project are:-

- to evaluate the effectiveness of approaches and techniques which have been employed to promote RA and stakeholder participation in EMS management scheme processes

- to analyse the contexts within which these techniques have been employed

- to make recommendations concerning good practice in different contexts.

In the UK the EC's Habitats and Birds Directives have been implemented through the Habitats Regulations which place a duty on RAs to produce and implement management schemes for EMSs. RAs are required to work in partnership with each other and with stakeholders in order to maintain the favourable conservation status of features within EMSs.

In developing and employing approaches and techniques for promoting RA and stakeholder participation in the management of EMSs, the following challenges need to be addressed.

- Individual combination of characteristics of each EMS.

- Statutory imperative to comply with legislation, which may alienate some stakeholders.

- Low level of awareness of the importance and value of marine conservation features

- Limited experience of RAs, particularly the NCAs, in fulfilling statutory conservation obligations in the marine environment.

- Relatively limited marine scientific knowledge base, which increases the degree of uncertainty under which decisions must be taken.

- The multiple-use and sectoral management policy framework.

- Resistance to outside interference amongst some stakeholder communities.

- Lack of experience of some project officers in developing partnerships for marine conservation.

This evaluation of the different approaches which have been developed to meet these challenges for the 15 case studies is largely based on the perspective this sample of EMS project officers. Given resource limitations and the relatively early stage in the process, when management schemes for the EMS case studies were still being developed, it was not possible to employ criteria or indicators of success based on the *outputs* from the EMS management schemes. Instead, criteria or indicators based on the emerging success or otherwise of the EMS management scheme *processes* were employed in order to provide a basis for more comprehensive evaluations in the future.

The literature on different approaches to managing marine nature reserves in the UK and around the world indicates that approaches which provide for the participation of RAs and stakeholders can promote cooperation, and that these relatively 'soft' bottom-up approaches need to be coupled with relatively 'hard' top-down approaches.

Social process concepts

Participation can be defined as *a social process through which people are able to influence and share control over the decisions which affect them.* Four levels of participation can be identified:-

1. Information sharing activities
2. Consultative activities
3. Collaborative activities
4. Empowerment activities

The four levels of participation are distinguished by an increasing intensity of communication, and by a shift in power relations from asymmetrical (top-down) to symmetrical (equal partners). Building partnerships with RAs, enabling a range of stakeholders to participate actively in decision-making, and informing/consulting with wider stakeholders are all social processes. Social scientists use the metaphor of **social capital** to describe the ways in which social processes in an area contribute to productive outcomes. Social capital is an expression of:-

- *Trust* in the honesty, integrity and sincerity of the individuals and organisations who are engaged in a joint project.

- *Confidence* in the knowledge, capabilities and authority of the individuals and organisations engaged in the process.

Social capital is produced through the interactions of people in their professional and personal **networks.** The productivity of these networks will depend on two key factors:-

- *Extensiveness* - a network may be diverse in its membership or tightly constrained to a particular interest group.

- *Density of relations* - a network contributing high social capital in a locality would be one where its members meet one another in many different contexts; and where there is widespread knowledge of what is happening elsewhere in the network.

Under the terms of the Habitats Regulations, RAs are to be brought together in partnership to take joint responsibility for the management of a site, which means that RAs will need to be engaged in all four stages of the participatory process. It is argued that it is important that EMS processes also engage stakeholders up to and including stage 3, *ie* bringing stakeholders into collaborative arrangements with the management partnership. Whether it is possible to empower stakeholders and so extend participation to stage 4 will depend largely on the political culture of the partnership.

It is proposed that **face-to-face communications** and allowing **sufficient time** for processes are key factors in the development of social capital and networks. In the specific context of EMSs, it is proposed that the following factors are particularly important in recognising and then building social capital for the EMS process.

1. Involving RAs and stakeholders in the initial management scheme design process demonstrates confidence in the expertise and knowledge of stakeholders, and builds trust in the commitment that exists to share power and responsibility.

2. Bringing RAs/stakeholders into partnership throughout the life of the project means that continuity can be achieved and allows time to build social relations and strengthen networks.

3. An ongoing open process of innovation, negotiation, modification and change will help to build consensus based on a better understanding of divergent positions, and help secure legitimacy for decisions.

4. By building social capital to support the EMS, there will be greater mutual accountability among RAs and stakeholders. This will increase commitment to resolving issues within the scheme and making it a success.

The effectiveness of EMS processes in building social capital is strongly related to the specific contexts in which they are carried out: **participatory processes are context-dependent processes.** The local characteristics of sites are therefore important, including:-

- physical features and landscape
- social and economic activities, both past and present
- political culture and, in particular, existing policy networks.

Case study methodology

The weakest element in participatory theory and practice is evaluation: robust indicators and mechanisms to track the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of participatory processes are still under development. It was therefore necessary to focus on the extent to which site-specific processes seem to be contributing to:-

- the development of enduring and robust social capacity which promotes cooperation and which can be drawn upon to address site management conflicts and sustain commitment;

- the potential to eventually achieve conservation objectives on a site and fulfil legal obligations.

Contextual evaluation

The concept of social capital is used to provide a means of categorising the 15 case studies, and to draw out the different approaches and techniques which have been employed to develop social capital. It is possible to broadly classify the 15 sites into two groups:-

Sites with stronger social capital at the start of the EMS process. In all but one case, it was found that the development of an estuary or firth management partnership prior to the EMS has generated substantial social capital, even where there were considerable conflicts between development and conservation interests prior to the EMP. In other cases, the lessons learned and approaches employed in previous nature conservation designations or similar initiatives helped develop relations between RAs, stakeholders and local NCA officers.

Sites with weaker social capital at the start of the EMS process. It is important to bear in mind that the social capital 'state' is considered solely in terms of the local history of partnerships and initiatives which have been developed to achieve objectives similar to those for EMSs, *ie* focused on marine conservation and integrated marine resource management. In most sites in this category there had been no previous overarching management initiative. Such areas are clearly not necessarily lacking in social cohesiveness, but it is argued that only partial social networks existed to support the development of the EMS.

Building on these baseline assessments of social capital states, it is possible to identify four categories of case studies in terms of their social capital 'directions', as is summarised in the table at the end of this summary.

Stronger social capital, successfully capitalised upon. In all these cases, the former social networks have been successfully utilised to develop the EMS. What is common to all these cases is that the previous management structures have been successfully adopted and/or adapted to provide for the development of the EMS.

Weaker social capital strengthened through the EMS. Approaches such as having many proactive meetings, workshops and discussions, and establishing relatively flat, inclusive management structures to provide for the active participation of stakeholders in partnership with RAs, appear to have been successful in strengthening social capital for the EMS in contexts where there was relatively little support beforehand.

Stronger social capital, but experienced some difficulties with the development of the EMS. In one case a previous voluntary conservation initiative had developed high social capital for a part of the EMS, but the initial decision to shelve this initiative whilst the EMS was being developed alienated some stakeholders and RAs. In another case the previous EMP had been successful in developing social capital, but the complicated and extensive nature of this site, the high number of RAs and stakeholders, and the potential for conflicts between development and conservation interests posed major challenges for the development of the EMS.

Weaker social capital, and experienced some difficulties in developing the EMS. In two cases the large, geographically fragmented character of the EMS has made it difficult for RAs and stakeholders to relate to the EMS as a single unit for management. Also, initial emphasis was given to establishing a management group for the RAs, which led to delays in recruiting support among stakeholders.

Key lessons from the 15 EMS case studies

Geographical contexts

- Where EMSs are large and consist of a number of geographically disconnected units, efforts need to be focused on identifying ways of developing RA/stakeholder awareness of the importance of managing the site as a whole, and/or of exploring the potential for 'federated' management structures.

- In rural sites where there are fewer potential stakeholders, there is a much higher expectation and need for participation by a greater proportion of stakeholders. In urban sites where there are more potential stakeholders, there is a lower expectation and need for participation of a smaller proportion of stakeholders. This needs to be taken into account when considering the appropriateness of participation techniques.

Pre-EMS management history

- Where social capital has been generated through a previous management initiative, this is more likely to be maintained and enhanced if the EMS is integrated with the previous initiative through adoption/adaptation of the management structure and approach.

- Where a previous management initiative has been unsuccessful in generating cross-sectoral social capital, it would appear to be advantageous to assess the underlying causes of this previous lack of success and focus efforts on addressing these, and/or, in extreme cases, to pursue the EMS separately.

EMS Management structures

- It is beneficial if the management structure that should be adopted is openly discussed at the outset with the participation of stakeholders.

- Two-tier management structures, in which RAs and stakeholders are represented through separate groups, would appear to be particularly appropriate to sites with a large number of potential stakeholders where social capital developed through previous initiatives is high.

- Two-tier management structures which are relatively bottom-up, in which many responsibilities are devolved to the stakeholder group, appear to be particularly appropriate where stakeholder numbers are high but social capital was initially low.

- Flat management structures, involving both RAs and stakeholders in the same group, would appear to be particularly appropriate for coastal areas where stakeholder numbers are relatively low and their stakes are relatively high, though this structure was also successfully applied to a site with many stakeholders, so should not be ruled out for such sites.

- A variety of RAs have adopted a lead role and this is very much a case-by-case decision depending upon the local political context.

Initial Consultation

- It is advantageous to have as many face-to-face meetings with RAs and stakeholders as early in the process as is feasible in order to personally engage/recruit people and build trust and confidence in the process

- Consultation packs on proposals to designate an EMS should include as much information as is feasible concerning potential management implications.

- Confining the consultation to owners/occupiers alienated some stakeholders, particularly fishermen: all direct stakeholders should be consulted.

RA partnership-building approaches

- Early workshops addressing and explaining the new responsibilities upon RAs appeared to have over-emphasised the legal duties and the potential consequences of non-compliance, which was less than optimal in developing a sense of partnership and shared responsibility amongst the RAs. Liaison between the EMS project officer and the national nature conservation agency (NCA) can avoid many potential problems by ensuring that workshops are presented in a manner which is sensitive to the local RA context.

- Participatory workshops can be problematic where RAs are used to a very formal approach and may not be familiar with more participatory, creative approaches. However, where RAs are more open to such workshops, or where specialist facilitation skills are employed, they can be very successful in 'breaking the ice' and developing relations amongst the RAs.

- Assigning RAs specific, tangible responsibilities related to the development of the management scheme as early as possible in the process helps generate partnership.

- Where a particular RA has taken a strong lead role in the initial development of the management scheme, it is important that they step back and encourage and provide for other RAs to take collective action in order to promote inter-RA cooperation and reduce the risk of loss of institutional momentum.

Stakeholder participation-building approaches

- When recruiting stakeholders, reliance should not be placed on statutory consultation lists, or on reaching wider stakeholders through groups such as Parish Councils, as both these approaches will 'miss' many stakeholders.

- Asking the stakeholders identified through initial efforts whether they might be able to suggest other stakeholders who should be involved appears to be a successful approach to increasing representation.

- Stakeholders are more likely to feel that they are partners in the EMS if they are, as far as is feasible, able to work in collaboration with the RAs through devolved two-tier management structures or are empowered through flat management structures.

- Where the input of stakeholders is restricted to discussion, advice, consultation and information provision, this can lead to apathy, a lack of willingness to cooperate with the management scheme, or even protests/defiance, particularly in rural sites.

- Where there have been problems developing stakeholder participation in the management scheme, the use of more participative consultation approaches on the draft management scheme can be used as an opportunity to engage stakeholders, as can a high profile launch of the final management scheme.

- Assigning stakeholders specific, tangible responsibilities related to the development of the management scheme can develop social capital and provide for constructive stakeholder participation.

- Integrating the identification of opportunities for compatible development and regeneration opportunities in the EMS promotes stakeholder (and some RA) participation.

- Project officers need to be aware of existing, perhaps latent, conflicts amongst stakeholders/RAs which the EMS may be drawn into.

- If consulting on a draft document, do not make it look too glossy and finalised as this can give stakeholders the impression that it is a *fait accompli*.

General approaches

- There is a need to achieve a balance between meeting deadlines and keeping the EMS moving forward, and not pushing the process too fast in a manner that may alienate some stakeholders/RAs.

- EMS structures and processes need to be designed from the outset as self-supporting in the longer-term absence of a dedicated project officer.

- It is important that a culture of honesty and trust is developed amongst RAs/stakeholders to provide for a generally positive and constructive political environment.

- It is important to emphasise nature conservation as a partnership process rather than reducing it to matters of science and legal responsibilities.

- In the longer term it is critical that initiatives arising from the EMS are seen to be happening on the ground in order to maintain the participation and commitment of RAs and stakeholders.

Role/value of specific participatory techniques

Participatory Appraisal: good means of gathering preliminary information on the site and the views of the participants on management issues, but not a means of facilitating deliberations concerning the resolution of conflicts and the development of a management scheme.

Future Search: good as a means of gathering preliminary information on the views of the participants concerning the site, but not as a means of facilitating deliberations concerning the fulfilment of objectives, the resolution of conflicts, and the development of management measures.

Consensus Building through stakeholder dialogue: this approach would appear to be effective in gathering initial information concerning the site, discussing conflicts, identifying opportunities and developing a management scheme which has the support of stakeholders and RAs

Role of Central NCA

Tensions arose in several instances over the input of the central NCA to the local process of developing a management scheme. These tensions could, to a degree, be overcome by:-

- ensuring that central NCA presentations and documents are sensitive to the local RA/stakeholder culture;

- avoiding scientific terms and acknowledging and respecting the knowledge and aspirations of stakeholders;

- ensuring that central NCA interventions are fully explained and preferably made in person, so that the local project officer is able to maintain some independence;

- ensuring that a positive, constructive approach is taken in order to support local initiatives and engender a sense of local ownership.

The delays in the delivery of the conservation objectives and operations advice was a significant issue in many case studies. The following approaches were generally successful in dealing with the delays.

- Provide for the input of stakeholders/RAs to the advice through informal and formal consultations, paying particular attention to demonstrating that stakeholder/RA input is being incorporated, and providing sufficient time for deliberation and response.

- Ensure that stakeholders/RAs have other tasks related to the development of the management scheme and to wider EMS issues whilst the objectives and operations advice is being further developed.

- Ensure that the RAs/stakeholders know what to expect in terms of the level of detail of the objectives and operations advice and its role in the management scheme preparation process.

Role of project officers

- The skills and competencies of project officers need to match the social and political culture of sites, *eg* on a rural site with close-knit communities, people skills and local knowledge may be particularly important, whilst on a complex urban site, political and scientific expertise may be particularly important.

- Project officers with appropriate experience of the local political culture should be employed where possible, particularly for sites which are likely to be politically sensitive or contentious.

- Where practicable and appropriate, EMS tasks should be undertaken by project officers rather than consultants as this develops their knowledge, experience and standing.

- Required project officer skills and training should be balanced between developing social/political capacity and in developing a scientific base for the management scheme.

The role of champions/opponents

- It is important to identify those individuals who have the trust and respect of certain factions of the stakeholder/RA community and to build there support for and understanding of the EMS.

Role of Science

- Scientific information concerning the site, including the details of why it was selected, should be made available as early in the EMS process as is possible, in order to maximise its impact.

- The potency of good, and often existing, scientific information in resolving conflicts should not be under-estimated.

- It should be made clear where there are gaps in the scientific knowledge in order to identify research/monitoring priorities, and where decisions need to be made under a degree of uncertainty.

- RA and stakeholder involvement in scientific assessments and monitoring exercises, including the recognition and utilisation of their ecological and other local knowledge, should be maximised.

Role of interpretation and publicity

- Information sharing activities are a pre-requisite for higher levels of participation and not a substitute.

- Glossy and expensive information sharing initiatives may alienate some RAs/stakeholders.

- Support can be promoted through the *process* of developing interpretive and publicity material by using local people in such initiatives and employing other local resources.

- It is important to achieve a balance between presenting the need for conservation with the need for compatible traditional activities and development opportunities.

Overview of European Marine Site case studies

State	EMS	No. RAs	No. SHs	Management history	Management Structure	Participation/ partnership-building	Other features
Higher: successfully capitalised upon	Plymouth Sound and Estuaries	14	400K	EMP: rebuilt previously strained relations	3 EMP structures: *two- tier*	AG has consultation/discussion function; SH/RA knowledge employed through workshops, q'aires, etc; emphasis on many meetings and honesty	Queen's Harbour Master important champion; liaison to ensure that NCA presentations sensitive to local context
	Strangford Lough	4	60K	ASSI, MNR: many conflicts aired and resolved	RA/SH Management Comm. With RA implementation Group: *flat*	SHs have decision-making powers in partnership with RAs on Management Comm., to which many tasks devolved; many conflicts previously negotiated through marine nature reserve (MNR)	Many relevant statutory functions within DoE(NI): aids integration; proceeding cautiously to ensure that management structure remains 'flat'
	Morecambe Bay	13	200K	EMP: rebuilt previously strained relations	MG - RAs; AG - EMP AG: *two-tier*	Meetings, including informal local meetings; surveys in partnership with RAs/SHs	Interpretation initiatives include prints produced by local artist and video/photos of marine life, as well as aerial photos of EMS
	Essex Estuaries	16	500K	EMP for part; relations built through SSSI/SPA liaison	2 EMP structures: *two-tier* + Harbour Authority AG - SHs and RAs.	Future Search workshop employed for one of EMPs: established visions for estuary, beyond EMS; emphasis on identifying compatible development opportunities	NCA PO focused on science and SH liaison, + LA PO focused on development opportunities and other strategic issues
	Solway Firth	16	100K	EMP which employed PRA workshops and consulted widely	EMP MG adopted EMS role; no AG - role fulfilled by previous EMP: *two-tier*	SH input previously provided through EMP ; informal scientific AG formed; otherwise EMP strategy and structure essentially fulfilling these roles	All SHs on EMP list sent leaflet introducing the EMS; Post-LIFE concerns, particularly as PO facilitates scientific AG
	Chesil and the Fleet	10	1K	Private estate led management structure since 1990; SPA 1985	Former structure employed: MG - RAs; AG – SHs: *two-tier*	Farmers not represented in former management structure so workshop planned to include them; long-standing scientific AG; statutory obligations played-down	EMS unique in that mostly owned by private estate; NCA/DETR workshop antagonised RAs
Lower: successfully developed	Papa Stour	6	0.15K	Pursuing local shellfisheries management	Advisory Panel consisting of RAs/SHs - TGs; *flat*	Great emphasis on meetings and local workshops	LA has had a key role in developing the flat Advisory Panel
	Sound of Arisaig	7	1K	None; some previous negative experiences with SSSIs	Management Forum consisting of RAs/SHs; most tasks devolved to TGs: *flat*	Emphasis on meetings and networking: PO knows and is a member of the local community; many SHs appreciated tourism development potential	LA has had a key role in developing and formalising the role of the flat Management Forum and TGs
	Loch Maddy	8	0.2K	None; some previous negative experiences with SSSIs	Open MG – RAs and SHs meet on an open to all basis: *flat*	Emphasis on meetings, networking and local workshops involving form of PRA; many SHs appreciated tourism development potential	Glass-bottomed boat chartered to promote awareness of EMS features; EMS interpretation centre being discussed
	Wash and N. Norfolk Coast	15	110K	EMP – *three-tier*; wildfowlers alienated	MG – RAs & commoners; AG split into 3 geographical areas; *two-tier*	EMS management structure separated from EMP in order to provide for wildfowlers participation; wildfowlers also involved in surveys, etc; emphasis on meetings	Listening and admitting mistakes important; RSPB warden was invaluable in developing participation of wildfowlers
	NE Kent	10	120K	None; some previous conflicts between LA & NCA	SH & RA Group have developed MS, with MG of RAs for implementation: *flat*	Consensus Building workshops used to provide for SH & RA participation; plan for coastal regeneration plan developed alongside EMS MS	LA, with whom there had previously been conflicts, had key role in development of and participation in CB workshops
Higher: experiencing some difficulties with development	Cardigan Bay	9	10K	Voluntary CMHC (for dolphins) largely established by SHs	MG, AG, & TG + annual conference: *three-tier*	Unclear/intangible role of AG &TGs has been an obstacle to participation; public meetings planned to discuss draft MS and develop SH interest	Initial shelving of Marine Heritage Coast alienated many RAs & SHs, some of whom became outspoken opponents of EMS
	Solent/S. Wight Maritime	40	1,140K	EMP: important for developing EMS: forum for discussions/objections	EMS MG – RAs; AG – EMP TGs: based on issues or geographical areas: *two tier*	EMS management structure agreed by RAs/SHs through EMP; too many RAs/SHs for meetings; reliance on letters, newsletters and public meetings	Complex site with many SHs/conflicts; disconnected: many estuaries, island/ mainland; EMS now divided into two
Lower: experiencing some difficulties with development	Llyn Peninsular and the Sarnau	10	60K	None	MG but insufficient interest amongst SHs in TG so SH Liaison Group established to discuss MS: *two-tier*	Two extensive mailings inviting expressions of interest in TGs yielded very few responses; public meetings stimulated interest in EMS as a result of which SH Liaison Group established	Difficulties in securing RA commitment, but this was overcome, partly by assigning MG task of establishing SH Liaison Group; discontinuous shape of site an issue?
	Berwick. & N. N'land Coast	27	35K	Partnerships established for parts: voluntary MNR, Heritage Coast & NNRs	MG – RAs; AG/TGs – SHs: *two tier*	Meetings important in re-engaging RAs and recruiting SHs + newspaper articles for SHs; RA participatory workshop 'fell flat': used to formal meetings;	AG delayed in face of MG apathy: long cross-border site, Reg. 33 delays and lack of issues; AG/TGs produced issues paper

List of abbreviations and acronyms

AG	Advisory Group
ASSI	Area of Special Scientific Interest: terrestrial/intertidal nature conservation designation in Northern Ireland, equivalent to SSSI.
CCW	Countryside Council for Wales
CMHCP	Ceredigion Marine Heritage Coast project
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions
DoE(NI)	Department of Environment (Northern Ireland)
EA	Environment Agency
EMP	Estuary (or Firth) Management Partnership
EMS	European Marine Site comprising UK SACs and SPAs (or part of) below the Highest Astronomical Tide level
EN	English Nature
LA	Local Authority
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MG	Management Group
MNR	Marine Nature Reserve
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MS	Management Scheme
NCA	Nature Conservation Agency: EN, SNH &/or CCW
NNR	National Nature Reserve
OLCDD	Operation Likely to Cause Disturbance or Deterioration
PDO	Potentially Damaging Operation (applies to SSSIs)
PO	Project Officer
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RA	Relevant Authority
SAC	Special Area of Conservation under the Habitats Directive
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SH	Stakeholder
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SPA	Special Protection Area under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC)
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest: terrestrial/intertidal nature conservation designation in England, Scotland and Wales
TG	Topic Group