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# Introduction: Social and cultural impacts of marine fisheries

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## ABSTRACT

The livelihoods and way of life of fishing communities globally are increasingly threatened as they struggle to cope with dwindling fish stocks and an increasing regulatory regime. However, the social and cultural aspects of marine fisheries are often overlooked in fisheries policy and management frameworks that focus on the biological and economic impacts of fishing in their efforts to halt the decline in key stocks. While this is understandable, sustainable fisheries are only likely to be achieved if management approaches integrate environmental, economic and social dimensions. In order to address this, and to explore conceptual and governance issues relating to the management of sustainable marine fisheries, an international conference entitled "It's Not Just About the Fish" was held in London in April 2011. This introductory paper provides a summary of the themes addressed and briefly describes the thirteen papers which comprise this Special Issue of *Marine Policy*. It is concluded that progress is starting to be made to address the important socio-cultural impacts of marine fishing on coastal communities worldwide. However, the challenge for researchers and policy makers is to work together to develop methodologies that allow the social and cultural values of marine fisheries to be fully accounted for and integrated into fisheries and marine policy.

*Keywords:* social, cultural, marine fisheries, inshore fishing, sustainable fisheries

Globally fisheries are in what has been called a state of 'crisis' [1-2], with 85% of marine fish stocks reported as either fully exploited, overexploited, depleted or recovering [3]. Governance of the world's fisheries, and the development of sustainable management approaches, is receiving increasing attention in research and policy-making contexts. However, fishing is not a homogenous activity. In order to catch a diverse range of fish, including pelagic, demersal and shellfish species, a variety of gear, vessel types and fishing activity is undertaken. An important distinction for the purposes of this Special Issue is the difference between large-scale (large high capacity vessels that generally fish off-shore and are at sea for multiple days) and small-scale (small – often under 10 metre – vessels that generally fish in coastal waters for periods of less than 24 hours). Latest estimates indicate

that small-scale marine and inland fisheries account for over half the world's fish catch and employ more than 90% of the world's 35 million capture fishers [3]. Although small-scale fisheries contribute economically, socially and culturally to society, the way of life and livelihoods of these fishing communities are increasingly under threat, with widespread poverty especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia [3]. Furthermore, in Europe, 88% of quota stocks are considered overfished [4] and a reform of the European Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is underway with the aim of delivering a more sustainable fishing industry and a brighter future for fishermen in Europe. In addition to measures aimed at managing fish stocks, the CFP reform also stresses the importance of thriving coastal communities.

It is timely therefore that there is a continued focus and debate on understanding the social and cultural impacts of marine fishing. Marine and fisheries policy debate has often focused on biological and economic aspects of marine fisheries management. However, it is being increasingly recognised that marine fishing is an essential element of broader integrated coastal management strategies [3, 5-6]. This Special Issue therefore asks: What are the social and cultural impacts of marine fishing on coastal communities, and how can approaches to valuing these impacts be developed and integrated into the policy process?

To begin this discussion, an international conference entitled 'It's Not Just About the Fish: Social and Cultural perspectives of sustainable marine fisheries' was held at the University of Greenwich on 4-5<sup>th</sup> April 2011. The aim of the conference was to explore the relationships between fishing, fishers and the wider community to assess the barriers and opportunities for the future sustainability and development of these communities. The conference was attended by over 100 delegates from 16 countries from around the world. The theme of the conference was to bring a spotlight on fisheries management from perspectives emerging out of the social sciences and geography.

The papers in this Special Issue of *Marine Policy* are (mostly) drawn from this conference. It is hoped that these contributions will help frame the broader significance of the value of fishing to society that has relevance to not only the European Common Fisheries Policy but also the international fisheries community. New perspectives are needed for the sustainable development of marine fisheries management that ensure healthy seas and healthy vibrant fishing communities.

This issue begins with two papers that set out and discuss fisheries management and governance, focusing on Europe and the UK. The first paper, by Caveen et al., brings attention to the importance of people's values in fisheries management and the use of epistemic community, advocacy coalition and discourse coalition models of policy networks to explore the role of science and scientists in influencing Marine Protected Area policy at the international level. This is followed by a discussion of the regional development and management of fisheries in the UK since the industrial revolution by Hance Smith. He concludes that in order to facilitate a regional approach to management, changes in legislative priorities are needed at EU, national and devolved administration levels to allow the interests of existing stakeholders to evolve. The third paper in the series acts as a bridge between the previous discussion of fisheries management and governance and the subsequent papers on the importance of understanding social and cultural contexts in marine fisheries management, with particular consideration given to the small-scale sector. Crilly and Esteban consider the importance of bio-economic modeling of social, economic and environmental impacts of fleets on fish resources in the North Sea cod fishery and their findings suggest that gillnets generate more positive values to society than large-scale trawlers, supporting the implementation of access criteria into the reform of the CFP to ensure fishermen generate positive societal and environmental outcomes.

This leads onto seven papers that all explore, through empirical studies, different aspects of the importance of social and cultural factors in marine fisheries management through mainly qualitative approaches. The first two of these papers adopt a wellbeing approach to assess how fisheries-dependent communities are affected by the decline in fisheries. Although these papers were not presented at the "It's Not Just About the Fish" conference, wellbeing is increasingly finding application in fisheries management and these

papers provide an important contribution to this agenda. Britton and Coulthard use a wellbeing approach to gain insights into the material, relational and cognitive dimensions of wellbeing in fishing communities in Northern Ireland. Using wellbeing as a lens to understand the distinctive features of artisanal fisheries in Piriápolis (Uruguay) and Paraty (Brazil), the second paper, by Trimble and Johnson, concludes that while fishers want to continue fishing in the future, they are moving into different occupations or supplementing their work in fishing with other employment. Trimble and Johnson found that artisanal fishers in Uruguay and Brazil identified fishing as a way of life, rather than just a job. This concurs with the following paper by Urquhart and Acott, who use the concept of sense of place to explore how fishers and non-fishers construct their identities in the coastal town of Hastings in south-east England. An argument is made that the impact of fisheries is felt through multiple dimensions including personal identity, place attachment and place character, which all have implications for understanding the importance of fisheries for coastal communities.

The following paper by Ross, investigating the notions of fisheries 'dependency' and 'community' in Fraserburgh, in Scotland, concludes that traditional definitions of a fishing 'community', which focus on place, job or history should perhaps be broadened to include the role of fishing in identity formation and the emotional attachment and relationships associated with the fishing industry. Next, Reed et al. make the case for translating lessons from food-based rural development into inshore fisheries. They consider the broader socio-cultural impact that fisheries can have on places and explore the potential use of new networks of belonging and valuing nature.

Zhao et al. address the role of women in fisheries, drawing on a study in northern England. The paper focuses on the key roles played by women in four fisheries sectors: capture fishing, families and communities, trading, processing and management/administration. They found that often women are engaged in 'invisible' and unpaid work in fisheries, such as taking responsibility for the paper-work of their fisher husbands, diversifying the family business and looking after the family.

Many of the fisheries and communities that have been addressed in the previous six papers in this section have a long history and heritage of fishing. The final paper in this section, by Pierce and Robinson, addresses the recent development of oyster farming in the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. By using a Five Capitals Framework for assessing rural sustainability, the authors demonstrate that oyster farming has had a predominantly positive effect on the social fabric of the area.

The final four papers adopt more quantitative methodologies for assessing the social, and economic, impacts of fishing on coastal communities. Firstly, Jacob et al. consider the development and evaluation of social indicators of vulnerability and resilience for fishing communities in the Gulf of Mexico. The positive agreement between both quantitative and ethnographic approaches suggests that the developed indicators are reliable measures of vulnerability and have potential application for decision-making. Van Putten et al. apply a Bayesian Network analysis to consider the variability in participation of indigenous fishers under key economic and socio-cultural drivers in the tropical rocklobster fishery in the Torres Strait, Australia. The data gathered were used to develop a management strategy evaluation tool for planning purposes.

The final paper in this Special Issue by Kleih et al., draws on the findings of a study conducted in six developing countries. The authors consider the role of financial services and the importance of credit requirements for small and medium-scale aquaculture and fisheries enterprises, concluding that traditional financial instruments are inadequate and suggest that innovative financial models need to be developed to fill the gap between traditional banking and grant-based donor finance.

It is hoped that this *Marine Policy* Special Issue has helped to frame some of the important contributions that the social sciences can make to marine fisheries management. A key theme that emerges out of these papers is that while fisheries exist in vastly differing contexts around the globe, many fishing communities are experiencing similar social and cultural impacts as a result of the global and regional decline in fishing. This Special Issue illustrates that, by drawing upon a diversity of research traditions and approaches, the broader

values of fisheries to society can be explored. Perhaps the challenge is how to make these multiple perspectives visible and relevant to policy makers to help lay the foundation for the development of sustainable coastal communities with a just and viable fishing industry playing a central role.

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