

# Making things work: Recognizing the values and interests of stakeholders

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### Abstract

*The focus of fisheries management agencies should not be only fish stocks, but also the environment for those stocks and the interests of user groups of those stocks.*

*Allocation issues involving marine resources are complex and require strong involvement of principal stakeholder groups in the decision-making processes. Stakeholders with a sense of ownership of these processes will have a sense of ownership of the outcomes.*

*The value of this focus by management agencies is illustrated by several examples involving Australian fisheries.*

### Introduction

This whole issue of shared stocks is about people. It is not really about fish. We can't control what fish do; we pretend we can, and the scientists will no doubt argue the point on that. I'll allow them to do so, but it is the activities of people that determine whether or not a stock is going to be healthy, or how we access stocks. You name it, the activities of people have the greatest impact on stocks and on the environment, and we can only manage the stocks by moderating the impact of the activities of people. So this issue really is

about people, and we're talking about the process of sharing the resource. We need to recognize the importance of all stakeholders, and that how they feel about each other in this process is very, very important.

### Case Studies

How do you deal with allocation of shared resources? There are some Australian nightmare case studies you can use — these show how the process hasn't worked. Everyone can think of two or three I am sure. So I'll refer to a couple of recent cases.

In Port Phillip Bay the scenario was a classic situation where recreational fishermen, and everybody in the wider community were saying, "Look, wasn't this great 20 years ago? You *used to* be able to go out and catch fish, you *used to* be able to just drop a line over the side — didn't even need to bait the hook." In fact, the commercial fishermen were saying much the same thing ("we never even used to put nets in the water they *used to* just jump in the boat"). Ha! Everything *used to* be fantastic! But now it's *not* fantastic!

Now there is a lot more pressure on the fisheries, and a lot more pressure on the resources, and so in this particular case a great number of recreational fishermen put a lot of

pressure on the government and the wider community, to re-allocate part of the resource. It was thought the way to do that was to remove the scallop fishery. We're not really sure how that really ties in. I guess it won't be known for some time, but I doubt it very much whether it will really affect, in ten years' time, whether an angler can go out and catch a snapper without any bait!!

Some of the outcomes of the re-allocation process, ultimately a political process, were great. They compensated people whose livelihoods were negatively affected and it is very important to recognize that compensation is going to deal, partially, with the issue of displaced effort, and it is also going to meet some of the associated economic demands that the wider community expect. But not all outcomes were positive. The process failed in that, now, most of stakeholders don't even want to know each other. This may have wider consequences.

I had a client on my vessel last year. A recreational fisherman from Port Phillip Bay, he said to me "Our association has just declared war. We have a native title claim about to come over some water and some access to one of our estuaries. You have been dealing pretty heavily with the issue of access with respect to native title, what do you think we should do?" I replied: "The Northern Territory is a pretty good example of what you have to do. The recreational fishermen have asked the commercial industry to represent them in the issue of native title, because native title only recognizes the interests of recreational fishermen through their office of local government. They are not considered as genuine stakeholders. So they actually asked us to make representation." His stunned reply

was, "There is no way I can talk to the commercial fisherman at the moment, because they absolutely hate us!"

We must be very conscious of the continual dilution and even destruction of the relationships between stakeholders. Other cases of allocation have had some parallels to the fall-out in Port Phillip Bay. A sad case in this respect is the Pumicestone Passage issue. Briefly, this is a very small fishery, with a few people netting for bream and mullet, which the scientists said was going well. However, there was a large number of recreational fishermen that *used to* go there on holidays, and so on. People just felt it was an area that needed to be re-allocated solely to recreational fishermen, primarily because there is the perception there that if there is a commercial fishery in an area, then anglers won't catch as much fish, and this will impact on the economics of the area. So SUNFISH, the representative body for the Queensland recreational fishermen, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on publicity and lobbying.

That's all legitimate. But here's the other side of the coin. Nugget Freeman (patriarch of the commercial fishermen in Pumicestone Passage) didn't leave a single dry eye in this country, when he turned to the journalists and said "What am I going to do? Where am I going to go? Where do I go now, what do my children do? There isn't any compensation for them, there isn't anything." Ted Loveday — the commercial fishermen's representative — put his Big Bull slippers on and went and talked to some senators and spent another hundred thousand dollars on a public relations exercise and managed to get the original decision to get the closure

of Pumicestone Passage overturned. The upshot of this little story is that we are now doing exactly what we used to, except that now we hate each other a little bit more. The saddest aspect I think many people will agree, is that the decline in resources in inshore fisheries in Queensland is not so much due to the effort exerted by recreational and commercial fishermen, but is more often a consequence of the habitat degradation and nursery loss that results from coastal development.

This leads us to a happier example. In Darwin Harbour there was to be a development called Darwin South, proposed in 1994, just before the Northern Territory election. They were going to develop this wonderful area — extensive estuarine mangrove foreshore — that provided a substantial part of the resource on which the recreational and commercial fishermen of the Northern Territory relied. We sat down, the recreational and commercial groups, together. And together we were able to deliver to the wider community and the local government a persuasive case that such a re-allocation of the resource was simply unacceptable to us, and clearly not in the interest of the wider community.

It wouldn't have been possible for me to go out on my own, to chirp to the journalists about the infrastructure of the businesses that would be affected in the commercial industry, and to talk to 35 000 recreational fishermen. Neither would the recreational fishermen have been able to do it on their own. And I would say that if SUNFISH and the Queensland Commercial Fishermen's Organization were able to act in the same manner together, as equal stakeholders, they may well have been able to ensure that the hundreds of thousands of

dollars mentioned previously were better spent toward ensuring that development along the coast of Queensland was more appropriately done.

The process followed in Darwin Harbour contrasts with the case of the Daly River closure to commercial barramundi fishing some years ago. There were a lot of tourists coming to the Northern Territory, and the Northern Territory government decided they would like to ensure the perception of a pristine fishery here, and that the Daly River would be allocated to the recreational fishery — although the scientists said “we have a very happy fishery!” Most people in the room will know about the history of that. Although the government itself made the decisions, the industry's subsequent distrust of fisheries managers lasted many years. We didn't talk to recreational fishermen, and the relationship was exceptionally bad.

Let's get back to the present, and a better approach. It was recently suggested that Shoal Bay and Darwin Harbour should be closed to commercial fishing. Part of the process to deal with these issues in the Northern Territory is that we try as an industry to speak to, and learn quickly from, the other stakeholders. We met with the Amateur Fishermen's Association of the NT, and we came out of that with a set of principles. Among these was that they would never ask us to shift without compensation, so dealing with the displacement of effort, and that made a huge difference to the whole issue. We didn't necessarily agree that the area would be closed. We spoke to the Minister, and so he understood exactly what was going on. Our process is trusted as equitable, and we are now in the throes of working out a compensation package that is going to deal with the

displacement of effort. That is the sort of process that we should look to.

In a meeting like this a few years ago, a traditional owner stood up and said "By the way, we are putting in a sea closure today around Groote Eylandt, throw out all the fishermen, we don't really know why, we're not talking to you about it, we've just decided it and that's it!!" I persuaded him that some sort of consultative process was needed, otherwise there would never be acceptance of their actions at a wider community level. I asked Darryl Grey, then Director of Fisheries in the Northern Territory, "You don't mind if I use some of the resources of your department with you to chair this meeting tomorrow?". To the Secretary of the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, I said "You don't mind if we borrow your building, with a room for a conference to try and solve some of these things?" It would be pretty hard to say no in front of a forum like this, so as a result, we now have the Anindilyakwa Consultative Committee. It has ownership by all the stakeholders, we have outcomes that involve trading both ways, so that it helped us understand each other's values and viewpoints.

This understanding has thus not only been about managing the stocks we impact on. We have been able to work together not only on a management programme for endangered species but also to work together towards ensuring we do the right thing in a much broader sense. It has ended up being characterized by a community that works very well together and it's been great!

## Conclusion

If I show you a picture of a fisherman with a smile, remember, he is not smiling because he's got fish, he's smiling because he's got a job. When we talk about sharing resources, we must identify the stakeholders. This is a big problem, because we must involve many players — the tackle industry, the fishing tour operators, the tourism industry, recreational fishermen. But remember — government people, researchers, fisheries managers — I can tell all of you that you would be without a job if it hadn't been for the commercial fishermen. We've all got a role to play, we've all got a commercial interest. The wider community is a stakeholder.

When we talk about the people, and the future, the decisions we make today are not only going to impact on us, they are going to impact on the people of the future. How do we really represent their interests? There is the recreational value of a stock, but at the end of the day you're also going to find someone is going to want a job — and these young people and their jobs are as important to all of us whether we be recreational fishermen or commercial fishermen. My industry will have a lot of problems unless we develop a process which avoids the *ad hoc* and political ways of allocating resources. I put it to you, David Hall, as the Director of Fisheries for the NT, to say a few words about whether your Division would be interested in allocating resources and time to ensure that the Northern Territory would be one of the first to start developing a process to allocate resources in the Northern Territory, in which all of the stakeholders have ownership.