MarXiv Summary

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Perceptions of social impacts likely drive feelings about MPAs

Negative attitudes toward established MPAs may have less to do with the actual impacts on one's ability to go fishing, but more to do with the perceived impacts on their wellbeing through feelings of fear, stress and injustice. Extractive users nearly all reported negative perceptions of the park, despite only two reporting increased financial costs. Those who held strong negative attitudes did not perceive any environmental benefits. The consultation process itself may have helped formulate negative perceptions of the park, after clear concessions were made to the commercial lobster fishing industry but not to other groups.

The authors focused this study on the Jurien Bay Marine Park ("the Park") located 200 km north of Perth, Australia. Declared in 2003, the Park is a multi-use MPA managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, covering more than 82,000 ha of water. In 2005, six zone types were added through an iterative consultation process with local stakeholder groups and a community advisory committee. Using semi-structured interviews with 50 members of these groups and representatives, the authors sought to determine the perceived social impacts of the Park to these stakeholders.

The authors determined that individuals across all stakeholder groups held negative attitudes toward the marine park in some form or another. Most commonly, these were negative feelings toward the current management plan or the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions itself. However, for those who reported feelings of injustice or inequality, negative attitudes were usually held toward the decision-making and consultation processes. Negative impacts were nearly exclusively reported by those who used the park for extractive purposes (for example, commercial fishing). Strong negative emotions that were commonly shared included fear, stress, betrayal and discrimination. Interestingly, negative impacts of the Park were reported more often by the representatives of the recreational fishing community than local, recreational fishers themselves.

Positive impacts from the establishment of the Park were reported more often by those who used the park for non-extractive purposes, like recreational activities and the tourism industry. These positive feelings toward the park were centered mainly on long-term benefits, such as attracting tourists and raising awareness about the local marine environment.

Respondents "who reported negative impacts also saw little or no positive impacts and displayed negative evaluations of the park." This was also true in reverse, as those who reported positive benefits reported few negative attitudes toward the Park. "No stakeholders who experienced significant negative impacts recognised any environmental benefits."

It is important to note that feelings of fear and stress from the establishment of the Park were not because of immediate financial impacts -- increased financial costs were only reported by two people who were both commercial fishers. However, fishers "described continually watching their locations while on the water to prevent fishing in the wrong zone by mistake, making fishing a less enjoyable experience". The addition of new regulations

This is a summary of:
Attitudes to a marine protected area are associated with perceived social impacts

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with the establishment of the Park, combined with existing management rules, likely contributed to regulation fatigue. Fishers reported stress from the added limitations on their ability to fish, and confusion related to these regulations all working together.

The community consultation process itself may have helped to breed negative feelings toward the Park. Recreational fishing industry representatives reported strong feelings of injustice and inequality as the commercial fishing industry was able to lobby for regulations that allowed for unfettered access for lobster fishing. A member of the community advisory committee probably put it best: "Having a dozen people all with different views sitting in a room arguing about squares on a map is not only ineffective in achieving the objectives that they really all want, but it's awfully damaging."

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