

Marine citizenship: are we ready? A UK case study

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Marine governance is undergoing a significant change, moving towards citizen-driven management and policy strategies, as recommended by international legislation, including the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2009), the UK's Marine and Coastal Access Act (2010); Australia's National Oceans Policy (1998) and Canada's Ocean's Act (1997) (Foster *et al.*, 2005). Historically, the marine environment has been managed on a sector-by-sector basis; however, this on-going shift is encouraging enhanced levels of community involvement in the development of effective marine governance. However, in order for this to be achievable and successful, we need to engender a marine literate society. Indeed, NOAA recognises a marine literate citizenry as being vital to achieving international marine management goals (NOAA, 2007). Further to this, research has suggested that individuals with higher levels of literacy would be more likely to behave in a favourable manner towards the environment, exhibiting a higher level of awareness of issues and the impacts of their behaviour on the marine environment (Haklay, 2002). While this is the ideal, research has indicated that levels of public literacy and awareness are low (Fletcher *et al.*, 2012; McKinley, 2011; McKinley and Fletcher, 2010; Fletcher and Potts, 2007; Fletcher *et al.*, 2009; Steel *et al.*, 2005).

This paper investigates the current capacity of UK citizens to facilitate the 'turn to citizenship' (Valencia-Saiz, 2005), focusing specifically on the role of marine citizenship (proposed by McKinley and Fletcher, 2010; 2012), and evaluating current capacity for public involvement in this process, examining levels of public ocean literacy, through a two pronged case study approach. Community interviews were conducted at five UK case study locations to assess levels of public understanding and knowledge of marine issues, while 3 schools participated in a questionnaire survey to evaluate the levels of literacy currently exhibited by the younger generations. Overall, it was evident that while there is a high degree of public concerns for the marine environment, interviewees were not aware of issues facing the marine environment, and had limited understanding of the relationship between their own lives and the marine environment. The research assessed some of the barriers to meaningful public involvement in the development and delivery of sustainable marine governance, concluding that a lack of personal connection, lack of awareness of societal behavioural impacts and a perceived level of expense associated with involvement are the primary challenges to marine governance bodies. The results of this study suggest low levels of public awareness, ineffective delivery of marine related education through formal processes and a limited understanding of the correlation between individual lifestyle choices and the marine environment. While this limited understanding poses significant challenges to participative marine governance strategies, earlier research has suggested that improving access to education and information and opportunities for meaningful engagement in the process will be central to the successful inclusion of citizens (Steel *et al.*, 2005; McKinley and Fletcher, 2010; Castle *et al.*, 2010; Roth, 1992). Therefore it is recommended that improved inclusion of the wider public as stakeholders of the marine environment through wider access to the process should be a key objective of marine managers and governance bodies. Additionally, it is recommended that improving the balance between formal and informal education strategies as a mechanism for enhancing public marine literacy. Finally, the research emphasises that if the goals set by contemporary marine governance are to be met, it is imperative that levels of literacy, awareness and the overall sense of citizenship towards the marine environment be improved.

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