

THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN MARINE POLICY AND MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM THE PISCES PROJECT

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Our coasts and seas are under growing pressure from the cumulative impacts of uncoordinated human activities and a lack of adequate protection for biodiversity. The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) has been introduced to improve the environmental status of Europe's seas. It requires Member States to implement marine strategies to manage their waters more sustainably using the ecosystem approach. An essential element of the ecosystem approach, and of successful marine management, is meaningful engagement of stakeholders. Coastal communities and marine sectors most affected by changes in marine systems and by marine policy should be engaged. It is necessary to bring together stakeholders with very different interests and expertise, and from different sectors and disciplines, in order to share knowledge, develop common understanding, and ultimately agree management measures.

PISCES (Partnerships Involving Stakeholders in the Celtic Sea EcoSystem) is a pioneering project involving stakeholders in the development of a practical guide for implementing the ecosystem approach in the Celtic Sea. PISCES is a ground-breaking project that is truly stakeholder-led and aims to translate EU marine policy into practical outputs for multiple sectors across a multinational area encompassing four countries: the UK, Ireland, France and Spain. This three-year project (2009 – 2012), part-funded by the European Commission LIFE+ programme, is building stakeholder partnerships and involvement through a programme of workshops, training and outreach. Stakeholders include representatives from all major sectors operating in the Celtic Sea (including fishing, aquaculture, renewable energy, shipping, telecommunications, aggregate extraction, ports and tourism) and Government agencies. A participative process, involving the stakeholder representatives from the different sectors of activity in the Celtic Sea, was established for the purpose of identifying realistic and meaningful management principles in line with the goals of the MSFD. Cross-sectoral partnerships resulting in increased understanding and participation are expected to enhance stakeholder incentives to protect the region, develop a sense of stewardship, and ultimately, result in greater compliance with marine legislation.

PISCES stakeholders have made a series of recommendations to help deliver the ecosystem approach in the Celtic Sea. Recommendations for governments and stakeholders are made on: how stakeholders should be involved in MSFD implementation; a future model for stakeholder engagement; and voluntary actions to deliver sustainable practices. The guide, aimed at policy-makers, sea-users, and marine managers, was launched in late 2012 for application in the Celtic Sea, other EU waters and beyond. The PISCES project's innovative, stakeholder-led approach demonstrates the benefits of stakeholder involvement in helping to foster multi-sector, trans-boundary working based on trust and mutual understanding. Lessons can be applied from PISCES to other areas, other marine policy contexts, and to the process of stakeholder engagement in marine policy implementation and management.