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Exploring the intersection between local governance and the Natural Capital Approach in the Marine Pioneer

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This report details the main findings from the research on the Marine Pioneer, a government pilot programme which tested key principles from the 25-Year Environment Plan (25-YEP). Research participants represent organisations based at national (Group 1), regional (Group 2) or local (Group 3) scales. The report recommends actions for all of these groups to improve the effectiveness of delivering the 25-YEP goal to restore nature.

Research details

Title of Study: 'A case study of the Marine Pioneer, investigating local resource management and natural capital valuation'.

Methods: Interviews, participant observation of Marine Pioneer Steering Group meetings and Participatory System Mapping (PSM).

Period of research: April 2017 – September 2020.

Study sites: North Devon and Suffolk.

Acronyms

25-YEP—25 Year Environment Plan

Brexit—Britain's exit from the European Union

DEP—Deben Estuary Partnership

Defra—Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DSIFCA—Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

EA Group 1 & 2—Environment Agency

EIFCA—Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

IFCAs—Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities

MMO—Marine Management Organisation

MPND—Marine Pioneer North Devon

MPS Group 2 and 3—Marine Pioneer Suffolk

NCA—Natural Capital Approach

NDBR—North Devon Biosphere Reserve

NDMWG—North Devon Marine Working Group

NGOs—Non-Government Organisations

NPA—National Policy Advisor

PSM—Participatory System Mapping

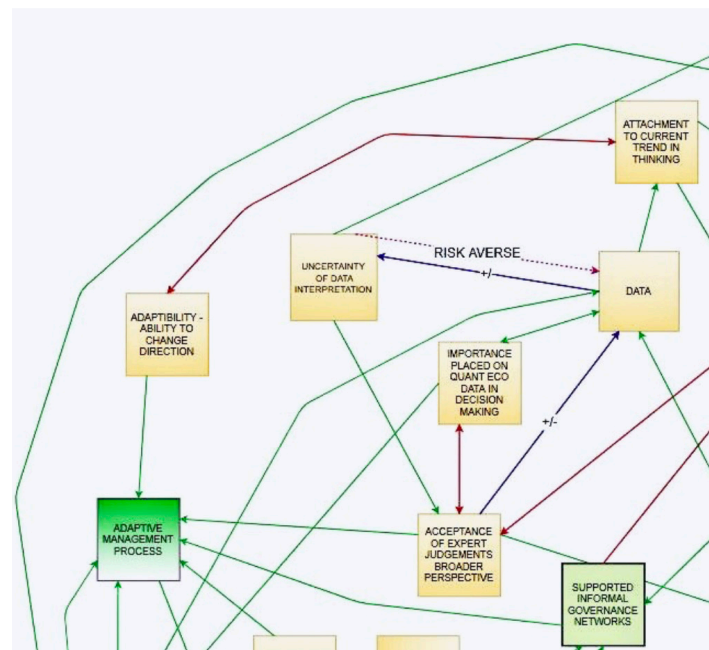
RDA—River Deben Association

SWEEP 1/2—South West Partnership for Environmental and Economic Prosperity

Disclaimer—Organisation names have been used but the views expressed may be personal. Definitions—Governance includes politics, the sharing of rights and responsibilities, setting the policy agenda and objectives (Kooiman et al. 2005). Co-management is the 'formalised process for sharing power and responsibility between the government and local resource users' (Berkes 2015, p.118).

Adaptability—the ability for governance to respond to environmental change

The theme which cut across the entire data set was adaptability. Participants from various organisational scales (national, regional, local) and sector (public, private and third) recognised that the UK marine governance system works within political constraints that limit flexibility. Political constraints are caused by rigid regulations (MMO, MPS2, SWEEP1, EA 1 and 2, EIFCA, NDMWG 2018 and NPA 2019) which challenge holistic management such as the Ecosystem-Based approach (DSIFCA 2018 and MPND 2019). The Marine Pioneer gave participants the opportunity to consider ways to ease these political constraints. For example, during the system mapping workshop in September 2018, Group 2 participants felt that UK marine governance addressed uncertainty through the prioritisation of ecological data. This attachment to ecological data was perceived to reduce adaptability as it did not account for local knowledge or socio-economic factors. One way to bypass this self-reinforcing cycle was considered to be the use of local knowledge, as part of a broader perspective.



Marine Pioneer Participatory System Map 1. Key- green arrow = positive causal relationship. Red arrow = negative causal relationship. Purple arrow = uncertain causal relationship. Pink arrow = an assumption of the Marine Pioneer.

Recommendations

- Consider political, scientific and local types of knowledge in evidence based decision-making and within the revisions of the 25-YEP (Groups 1, 2 & 3).

Governance—strength in diversity

Governance was analysed at three levels: the participation of members of local conservation groups, co-management and multi-level governance.

Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein 1969) was used in follow-up interviews for participants to rank the participation of people from local conservation groups in decision-making in the Marine Pioneer. The ladder is a scale from non-participation (1) to full citizen power (8). The mean score was placation (5) where local people have some influence in decisions, but powerholders can judge the legitimacy of knowledge. Placation was chosen due to the lack of autonomy of local groups away from government departments (DEP, MPS3, MMO and NPA 2019) and the scientific and political nature of the Natural Capital Approach (NCA) (NDMWG and MPS2 2019). Participants acknowledged that local stakeholder engagement was strongly supported but that due to national governance the level of citizen power in the Marine Pioneer could not rise beyond placation.

There was no set aim to test co-management through the Marine Pioneer, but investigating co-management enabled consideration of power relations. At both sites, members of Group 3 felt that national organisations were more influential in local marine governance and that localised decision-making requires a devolution of power. The UK marine governance system is complex, with fragmented and sometimes overlapping responsibilities. Participants from Groups 2 and 3 spoke of the need to improve integration, to provide transparency for stakeholders (EIFCA 2018), connect local



It varies depending on the issue being discussed and the controlling body that we're dealing with. Some statutory authorities and organisations are much more willing to work with us on the sort of element of delegated power and other people freak out and basically say no, we have to control what you're doing.

DEP, August 2019

and national scales (Defra, MMO, NDMWG 2018) and join up siloed fisheries management, conservation, marine planning and licensing (DSIFCA, NDBR 2018) and land and sea decision-making (SWEEP1, NDMWG 2018). Partnerships were seen as an integral step to improve integration, for example the North Devon Marine Pioneer steering group which was supported by prior relationships of trust and communication. Having members from the private and third sectors enabled the group to continue despite political constraints (e.g. Brexit), exchange information, deliver outputs and secure funds. Some individuals in the Marine Pioneer held vital roles which strengthened the relations between and within groups (creating 'social capital'). The National Marine Pioneer lead enabled communication between local and national decision-makers, site leads and steering group members communicated between local and regional scales (bridging) and members of local conservation groups strengthened internal relations within their groups (bonding).



Recommendations

- Map the responsibilities of all organisations in the UK marine governance system to identify overlapping responsibilities or areas which require improved co-ordination or integration (Groups 1 & 2).
- Set up and support a network of well-connected individuals from across sectors to join-up thinking and action for UK marine governance (Groups 1 & 2).

Natural capital—enables consideration of broader governance issues

The NCA is a strategy for environmental valuation which can include the environment in trade-off decisions about natural resource use. Experimental implementation of the NCA enabled Group 2 to learn whether the approach was supported by local stakeholders and where it needed to be adapted. There were two suggestions about how the NCA could be adapted to suit local implementation. Firstly, members of Group 3 at both sites felt that the NCA should incorporate the diversity of values held for nature at a local scale. There was a strong response towards values connected to 'well-being'. For example, local people in Suffolk who responded to the Deben Estuary Plan consultation prioritised the protection of tranquillity. Secondly, the language used to communicate the NCA was important to how people gave the approach meaning. The economic, technical language minimised the ability to include local knowledge into decisions and caused a fear of valuing nature as a commodity.



If you did an article saying, 'We are losing the Curlew' a very much-loved bird along our Estuary, 'this is what we need to do about it, would you help?', the local community would. When you break natural capital down into its little constituent pieces and find something that is quite emotive, you would get the community on side. Short of doing that it doesn't mean anything to people"

RDA, September 2018.



Recommendations

- The purpose of the NCA must be made explicit and language used must enable input from different types of knowledge (Groups 1, 2 & 3).
- Integrated governance and shared goals should be considered when using the NCA to enable effective local implementation (Groups 1, 2 & 3).

Piloting—the space for innovation and influence

The Pioneer provided a space where government and NGOs could collaborate for greater impact. Those who engaged in the Pioneer embraced learning-by-doing, seeing failure as an opportunity to learn (EA and NDBR 2018). Despite the freedom awarded to the Pioneer by Defra (in terms of targets and delivery), actions were bound by the law, policy and limited resources. Law can be used to control uncertainty but can also restrain adaptive management (Ebbeson 2010).

Political events had an impact in slowing or rushing the progress of projects. For example, the late publication of the 25-YEP delayed the setting of Pioneer aims and lessons were not ready to input into policy for Brexit (e.g. the Environment and Fisheries Bills). Limited financial and human resources caused groups to join forces and form partnerships (e.g. North Devon steering group). There were many benefits experienced by working together; communication between government agencies (EA 2019) and government agencies and NGOs (MMO 2019) and the use of scientific data regarding the NCA in policy decisions (SWEEP2 2019) were all thought to have improved. Despite these closer relations, the short-term funding of site leads caused Group 2 to fear loss of vital co-ordination, knowledge and the ability to forge a robust institutional link between national and local scale organisations, which remains a priority area. A clear route for the learning from pilots to influence national decisions requires active engagement between government departments and regional/local managers.

► Recommendations

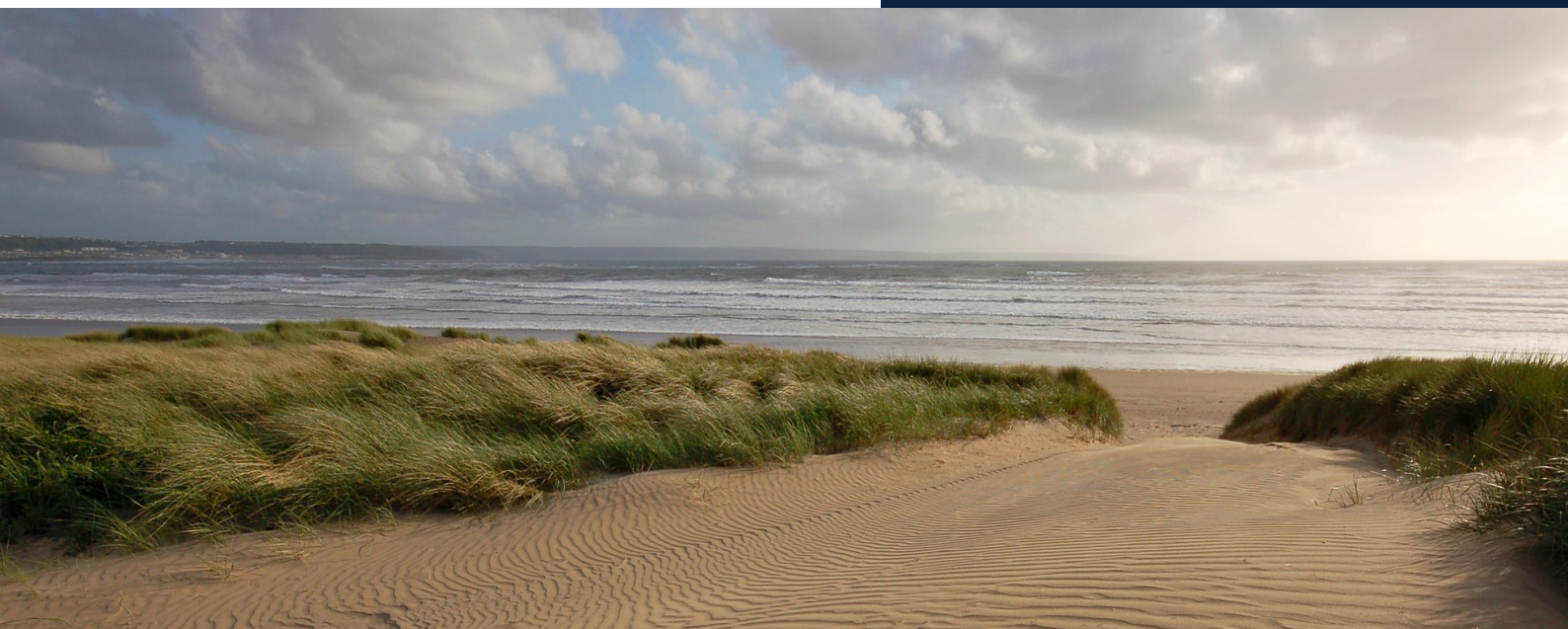
- Where possible co-ordinate the timelines of learning from pilots with the timing of forthcoming law and policy (Group 1).
- Group leaders who provide bridging links between organisations require cross-sector financial support to strengthen multi-scale and sector relations. (Groups 1, 2 & 3)
- Public funds should be used as a demonstration of support to local conservation groups. Where possible government actors should engage in local programmes, to legitimise local actions and communicate to build trust and connect decision-making between local and national organisations (Groups 1, 2 & 3).

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You'd hope they'd (Defra) see the benefits of being supportive in that, instead of being the law maker and law enforcer they're actually the one that underpins and supports the local decisions.

NDBR, September 2018

**Thank you for your support
for this research.**



Saunton Sands. Photo: Tim Coleman / Flickr (CC-BY-NC_ND 2.0)

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