

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS IN FISHERIES GOVERNANCE**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter explores the evolving role played by environmental NGOs (ENGOS) in UK fisheries governance in recent years. This role has grown exponentially, as the environmental dimension of fisheries activity has become increasingly understood and accepted by regulators and even by fishermen. There are three sections in the chapter: the first section explains how ENGOS have moved on from ‘problem identification’ to embrace ‘problem solving’; the second section provides five illustrations of ENGO engagement in problem solving; and the third section addresses the challenges of the future, focusing on ENGO participation in the new European Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), and discussing ways in which ENGOS can fulfil their vastly increased workload in relation to fisheries governance.

#### **12.1 Introduction**

During the last twenty years, the context of fisheries governance has changed dramatically. From a time when the focus was almost exclusively upon managing the exploitation of fish stocks in a way that would maximise long term commercial catches, the focus today is increasingly upon protecting marine ecosystems, so that fishing activity can only take place when and where it is consistent with ecosystem health. Environmental NGOs (ENGOS) have played a central part in bringing about this change, and they continue their efforts to consolidate and implement it. However, they are finding that it is committing them to a major allocation of resources, and they have to find ways of coping with this inflated workload. In a sense, they are the victims of their own success.

In the first section of this chapter, I explain the changing role of ENGOS in relation to fisheries governance – from campaigning for ‘problem identification’ to collaborating in ‘problem solving’. This shift is a familiar pattern for ENGOS who are working in other areas of environmental governance, but in the case of fisheries, it has been a particularly rapid process. This is not to say that ENGOS have abandoned their campaigning for problem identification – far from it; there are many environmental issues about fisheries that still have not been properly recognised, and ENGOS continue to mount campaigns to highlight them (for example, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) long-standing campaign against industrial fishing, and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC)’s current high profile campaign for a moratorium on deep water trawling on the high seas). Nor is it to suggest that collaboration in problem solving has sorted out all the problems that have been identified. There is still a lot of resistance among resource users to environmental constraints on their activities, and ENGOS have to continue to push hard if they are to make headway. However, at least some progress

is being made in moving beyond issue recognition to doing something about the issues, and ENGOs are contributing significantly to that progress.

In the second section, I examine five instances where ENGOs have been engaged in problem solving, and evaluate how effective they have been. The first case is the Shetland sandeel fisheries management partnership, which was a pathfinding example of cooperation between fishers, regulators and ENGOs (the RSPB) to find a way of protecting seabirds' supply of sandeel prey, while balancing the needs of the commercial exploitation of the sandeel stock. The second case is ENGO participation in the meetings of the influential North Sea Conferences, which materially pushed the agenda forward on the issues of the ecosystem-based approach (EBA) and the precautionary principle (PP), now widely accepted rules of fisheries management. The third case is the 2002 reform process of the European Union (EU) Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), to which the ENGOs contributed, helping to push the CFP in the direction of EBA and PP. The fourth case is more diffuse – the forging of various bilateral links with the fishing industry: some ENGOs have succeeded in working with fishers to bring in environmental measures that they can accept. The fifth case is the ENGOs' recent admission to the European Commission's Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA), which may stiffen the committee's resolve on environmental impacts of fishing.

In the third section, I discuss the future prospects for ENGOs in European fisheries governance, concentrating on the opportunities provided by their participation in the newly established seven Regional Advisory Councils (RACs). A significant concern here is with the added burden that this and other opportunities entail for ENGOs. One strategy that they can employ to deal with this workload is to work more closely with each other to share the burden. The fact that the ENGOs have such a problem is, however, a welcome sign of their success in stamping an environmental signature on fisheries governance.

## **12.2 The nature of the change**

The role of ENGOs in fisheries governance has developed significantly in recent years, reflecting a transition from the phase of 'problem identification' to include also 'problem solving'. The 'problem identification' phase is the ENGO's classic 'whistleblower' role where it capitalises on its communication resources to raise awareness about an identified conflict in attempts to galvanise the political and practical action which characterises the problem solving phase. Problem identification was the hallmark of the relatively limited ENGO activity in fisheries in the 1980s – 'limited' because fisheries was scarcely perceived as an environmental issue for ENGOs. In addition, there was little progress towards getting involved in problem solving because there was no access route for ENGOs to the levers of fisheries governance in those days. All things considered, we could characterise the ENGOs' role in the early days as 'occasional whistleblower'.

As the ENGOs strove to enter the closed shop of fisheries, raise the environmental issues they had identified, and be acknowledged as a stakeholder, they were generally