

Facilitating Governance of Baltic Seas Fisheries by Improving Communication Among Stakeholders

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Summary

This project was designed to improve communication among stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BS RAC) and its partner organizations as a means to improve effective governance of the Baltic Sea Fisheries in a sustainable manner. The research included focused observation of meetings and procedures and in-depth interviews with members of the BS RAC, ICES (International Council on Exploration of the Seas) and Member States' agency scientists, NGO (non-governmental organization) representatives, and European Commission staff.

The results show that due to the complexity of the issues and the diversity of the BS RAC members, finding consensus is difficult for reasons that include distrust among the stakeholders and different levels of participation, communicative skills and approaches to consensus building. In addition, the level of understanding and clarity of communication of science among stakeholders has a major impact on the RAC discussions. Different understandings of scientific concepts and language, lack of trust in scientific assessments, and discrepancies between scientific data and local knowledge were identified as significant barriers to a productive dialogue process leading to consensus among the stakeholders.

The research shows that a conscious and reflective effort to improve the consensus development, including designed dialogue techniques, transparent and understandable science communication within the RAC itself, as well as improved feedback loops with the Commission and RAC members' constituency will help improve the effectiveness and impact of the RAC.

Based on these findings, the second part of the project developed interventions to promote the formation of informed consensus through joint fact-finding and discussions facilitated by informed and skilful mediators. In close collaboration with the BS RAC members, gcPLUS organised a science workshop to introduce the methods and rationale for mediated dialogues on strongly contested science-related issues.

Since the need for facilitated discussions appeared to be especially high among the new EU member states, gcPLUS also encouraged, organised and mediated a consensus dialogue process - the "Polish Roundtable Forum for Fisheries" - between fishermen, environmentalists, scientists and governmental representatives in Poland. This ongoing initiative is designed to overcome the highly fragmented organisational structure of fisheries in Poland and help the stakeholders to find common positions on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2012. This will also improve the ability of Polish members to contribute effectively to the discussions in the BS RAC and therefore to the better and more equitable participatory functioning of the BS RAC.