Non-Technical Summary

Identifying, communicating and integrating social considerations into future management concerns in inshore commercial fisheries in Coastal Queensland

Dr Sylvie Shaw, Dr Helen Johnson,
and Dr Wolfram Dressler
The University of Queensland

Project No. 2008/073

Australian Government

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation

Queensland Seafood
Industry Association
www.queenslandseafood.com.au

THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

2008/073	Identifying, communicating and integrating social considerations into future management concerns in inshore commercial fisheries in Coastal Queensland

Principal Investigator: Dr Sylvie Shaw
Address: The University of Queensland
School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics
Brisbane QLD 4072
Telephone: 07 33656322 Fax: 07 33651968

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the attitudes, values and experiences of fishers involved in inshore fisheries in three Queensland regions;
2. To identify the social and economic impacts on fishers, their families and ancillary businesses by examining the well-being, quality of life outcomes and social resilience as a result of fishing closures and fishing effort rationalisation;
3. To examine adjustments in households amongst fishers and spouses; and
4. To investigate the ways in which fishers and their families are adapting to social, economic and ecological change.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED TO DATE

1. A detailed social analysis of the impacts of socio-economic change on commercial inshore fishers, their families and ancillary business owners in three Queensland regions.

2. An analysis of the major health, well-being and quality of life risks perceived by and affecting fishers and their families to be linked to policy changes on marine protected areas and industry restructuring.

3. An analysis of the attitudes, reactions and resilience of sixty interviewees across Moreton Bay, Hervey Bay and the Burdekin which will be valuable in the development of qualitative and quantitative management and policy frameworks, monitoring and evaluation.

4. An outline of the significant concerns of individuals affected by policy change at a 'micro' level. It explains that social factors, although a central focus of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD), have had limited attention in Queensland fisheries management and policy.

5. An examination of the social, familial and personal impacts of policy decisions which highlights the need for the inclusion of social impact assessments (SIAs) and the development of social impact management plans for all major management and policy change in fisheries.

6. Recommendations on the need for greater awareness of the implications of the social impacts of management decisions, better communications, the provision of retraining opportunities and business and career advice, and the understanding of the serious health and well-being outcomes connected with social and economic change.

KEYWORDS: Commercial fisheries, commercial fishers and families, health, social impact assessment, well-being.

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This study interviewed fishers and their families in three regions along the coast of the state of Queensland during 2010. It sought to examine the social impacts of fisheries change in Moreton Bay, Hervey Bay and the Burdekin on inshore fishers, their partners, and ancillary businesses. The study identified that commercial fishers' livelihoods and lives have been subject to a range of largely negative social and economic impacts that have been inadequately assessed, less adequately communicated to fishers, and have not been managed with structured social impact management plans. Even those fishers deemed to be 'success stories' within the industry are aware of the dramatic direct and indirect impacts upon the fishing industry. They speak of their good fortune in terms of their initially strong financial position prior to the changes and their need to work exceptionally long hours in order to retain a viable income and to benefit from the changes. The social and economic impacts have been generated by changes to marine park zones, industry restructuring, fisheries reviews and other regulatory and policy changes, and by government agencies' interventions into fishing as an occupation.

The study reveals how fishing people in the three regions have faced a series of challenges arising from these changes, with only limited consideration of, and support for, the social, personal and family implications of such change. Our research findings suggest that the current management focus on economic and ecological goals fails to sufficiently address the cumulative short and longer-term social impacts of fisheries change, in particular, the effect on the health, well-being and quality of life of the people interviewed for this study. These findings are analysed from the views and responses of the fishers and their families to the personal and social consequences they continue to experience.

Notably, the study shows there is a lack of communication from policymakers about the possible social ramifications or potentially damaging social impacts arising from management measures and major policy initiatives. The consequences of changes to marine parks and those wrought by restructuring are shown to negatively affect the health, well-being and quality of life of the interviewees. Interview responses provide evidence of the initial and ongoing effects of socio-economic change, and illustrate the way fishers' needs in adapting to the changed conditions have not been well-integrated into management actions and policy frameworks in Queensland.

This report is not intended as a simplistic critique of government policies and programs, arguing 'for the fishermen' and 'against management'. Rather, the goal is to provide an analysis of the fishers' perceptions and understandings towards changes in the industry, which can be constructively used in future policymaking. By focusing on the perspectives and experiences of commercial fishers and analysing them in the light of broader changes in the industry, we suggest that future policy actions can take such perspectives into account in more beneficial ways.

Importantly, this study finds that the limited consideration of the social ramifications of social, individual and family experiences of fisheries change is reflected in a number of factors that have relevance for management decisions and policy actions in Queensland:

- A lack of recognition of the importance of fishing as a way of life and choice of career;
- A gap in communication between managers, scientists and fishers on decisions affecting fishers' working lives;
- Limited inclusion of fishers' knowledge, expertise and experience in scientific research and decision making;
- A sporadic assessment of the effects of social, economic, cultural and structural change on fishers and fishing families;
- Limited attention to the health and well-being risks of fisheries change, especially those related to mental health issues including stress, anxiety, depression, and seriously contemplated and actual suicide;
- Minimal counselling (financial, professional and personal) related to the potential and actual social and economic impacts of policy change;
- Limited information about alternative career paths or skills training and retraining, and about financial assistance to undertake such training; and
- Little advice on how to manage or develop fishing businesses in light of the changes and impacts, and how to plan for the future.

Different fisheries are affected in different ways by industrial, social and economic change. Some fishers and their families seem to cope better than others, often because they are in a strong financial position prior to the changes wrought by restructuring. Our study also confirms research on social resilience by Marshall and Marshall (2007) and Tobin et al. (2010) on the factors affecting individual coping mechanisms and resilience.

Overall in the three sites, older, less well-educated or lower income 'lifestyle' fishers are finding it harder to cope with the impacts of shifting regulations and policy changes. Issues of grief and disillusionment are most apparent amongst this group, not only about the negative impact of change on individuals and families, but on fishing as way of life and its historical, community and coastal heritage. This contrasts with the more 'entrepreneurial' fishers who are innovative, adaptive and doing well. However, fishers are resilient. They display a mental toughness born of years of 'at sea experience', which has allowed them to weather the changes and adjust to the new conditions.

The commonalities of interviewees' perceptions and experiences of change across the three regions and among different fisheries demonstrate the necessity to develop strategies for explicitly valuing and incorporating social concerns and attendant social impact assessments and social impact management plans into fisheries and environmental management in Queensland.

Our study affirms the results of similar studies conducted both internationally and within Australia on the social and economic impacts of fisheries change. It contends that significant training in the social and economic impacts of government-driven restructuring, as well as greater attention to meaningful communication across the differing sectors (fisheries, science, management), would assist in the future planning, design, implementation, and enactment of interventions in fishing and allied occupational sectors.

References cited

Marshall, N.A. and P.A. Marshall. 2007. 'Conceptualizing and operationalizing social resilience within commercial fisheries in Northern Australia.' *Ecology and Society* 12(1). Online: http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol12/iss1/art1/.

Tobin, R.C., S.G. Sutton, A. Penny, L. Williams, J. Maroske, and J. Nilsson. 2010. *Baseline socio-economic data for Queensland east coast inshore and rocky reef fishery stakeholders. Part A: commercial fishers.* Report. Fishing and Fisheries Research Centre, Townsville, Qld.

Telephone: (07) 3262 6855
Facsimile: (07) 3262 7650

Email: qsia@qsia.com.au
Website: www.qsia.com.au

CONTACT:

Queensland Seafood Industry Association
Suite 12, 699 – 713 Sandgate Road,
Clayfield Qld 4011 AUSTRALIA

Telephone: (07) 3262 6855
Facsimile: (07) 3262 7650

Email: qsia@qsia.com.au
Website: www.qsia.com.au