

Establishing a Statewide Baseline and Long-Term MPA Monitoring Program for Commercial and Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel Fisheries in the State of California

Key Communicators Webinar to Guide the Design of a Draft Port Community Well-being Assessment Tool and Focus Group Discussions

Friday, January 31, 2020

Presentation and Discussion Highlights Summary

The MPA Human Uses project team¹ hosted a [webinar on January 31, 2020](#), to gain guidance and expertise from commercial fishermen and Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) owners/operators, researchers, and managers² on the design of a draft 'Port Community Well-being Assessment Tool' (draft assessment tool) and related on-the-ground focus group discussions to help evaluate the performance of California's marine protected area (MPA) network.

The goals of the webinar were to gather a small group of leaders, or Key Communicators (KCs)³, across target audiences and:

- create a shared understanding of the purpose, value, and utility of the draft assessment tool to assess port community health;
- identify a clear pathway for the project team to refine the draft assessment tool based on key communicator feedback; and
- inform the development of an updated process design for focus group discussions based on key communicator feedback.

This summary of key highlights provides a high-level overview of the topics, questions, and outputs discussed during the webinar, as well as feedback received from an online questionnaire, which both webinar participants and non-participants were invited to complete. Webinar participants were invited to review a draft of this summary for accuracy prior to finalizing this document and making it publicly available. This document only contains a summary of the feedback received. The project team will follow up with a revised process design and assessment tool and provide details on how feedback was considered and/or addressed.

¹ Comprised of Humboldt State University (HSU) researchers, Ecotrust, and Strategic Earth Consulting, the MPA Human Uses Project Team is supporting the state to assess the baseline socioeconomic conditions of commercial and commercial passenger fishing vessel (CPFV) fisheries throughout the state of California.

² Individuals were selected for participation in the webinar based on the expertise of the project team, coupled with guidance from invitees about others to invite.

³ For the purposes of this project, Key Communicators are defined as recognized leaders who have a thorough understanding of the perspectives and priorities of their respective communities/affiliations and act as a conduit of information about policy and management processes through their networks and communications channels.

The following materials were discussed during the webinar and are available as reference:

- [Webinar Agenda](#)
- [Webinar Slide Deck](#)
- [Proposed Methodology for Focus Groups and 'Port Community Well-being Assessment Tool' for Key Communicator Review](#)
- [Port Groupings Summary](#)

Presentation Highlights

Project team members provided a series of [presentations](#) highlighting the core components of the MPA Human Uses project for KC feedback and review.

Introducing the Draft 'Port Community Well-being Assessment' Tool

Laurie Richmond, a professor of environmental management at HSU and one of the project's principal investigators (PI), introduced the [draft 'Port Community Well-being Assessment' tool](#), including the short- and long-term goals for the tool's application both in the context of MPAs and beyond. She explained the rationale behind using focus groups to collect quantitative and qualitative data, and the benefits that can be derived from this approach, including its replicability and introduction of context to spatial and quantitative analysis. Laurie highlighted that gathering information about overall community well-being and specific outcomes from MPAs can help to better understand community context, which is important for understanding MPA outcomes. She shared the proposed process design, and detailed the focus group approach for commercial fishermen and the conversation approach for CPFV operators. Laurie briefly reviewed the well-being and MPA question topics, and walked participants through the proposed methods for analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

Compiling Statewide Spatial and Economic Baseline Data

Cheryl Chen and Jon Bonkoski, co-PIs with Ecotrust, shared information about the analysis of existing spatial data and the vision for end-products resulting from the project. They explained how California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) commercial landings data and CPFV logbook data will be used to create statewide commercial and CPFV fishing maps while acknowledging the difficulties of working with spatial data from various regions collected at different times. They discussed the application of integrative analysis to the project, in which spatial data and ecological research will both be used to better understand MPA performance and the gaps that exist in MPA performance assessments. They shared existing web-based tools and proposed using these as a model for project products.

Planning Focus Groups

Kelly Sayce, one of the PIs and principal with Strategic Earth Consulting, provided an overview of the first two stages of the project (three stages in total). She explained the project is currently in stage one,

in which the project team developed the draft assessment tool, identified KCs for guidance on the tool, planned and convened a webinar to request reviewer feedback on the tool, and will pilot the tool and finalize tool questions after evaluating pilot performance. She detailed stage two in which the project team will engage representatives of commercial and CPFV fishing communities and use the draft assessment tool developed in stage one to gather quantitative and qualitative information about port community well-being and impacts from, and adaptation to, the California MPAs.

Discussion Highlights

KCs were invited to provide feedback about the project design, draft assessment tool, focus groups process design, data analysis, and communication of study findings. Highlights of this feedback and related discussions are included below.

Project Design and Value

Collecting qualitative data and quantitative data can provide important context and allow us to gain a deeper understanding of fishermen's priorities than if quantitative information was gathered alone. Clarification is needed to better understand how data gathered in the study might be used to inform MPA management and/or address the pressing needs and priorities of California commercial and CPFV fishermen.

- One KC questioned why stakeholders would trust that the state is interested in considering the socioeconomic data gathered through this project since the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) did not distinctly consider socioeconomic effects. From their perspective, MPAs were created for their intrinsic ecological value so it is unclear why MPA monitoring, including the collection of socioeconomic information, is needed.
 - An agency representative from the state did want to make clear that from their perspective socioeconomic monitoring and outcomes remain valuable inputs for MPA and fisheries management.
- A question was asked regarding how an MPA 'statewide baseline' is defined, considering some MPAs were implemented over a decade before this project began.
 - It was suggested that MPA monitoring reference sites (i.e., areas outside MPAs with similar habitat inside comparison MPAs) include areas across broader geographic ranges than within a specific MPA region to more accurately observe changes in ecosystem health due to MPA impacts (e.g., displaced fishing effort).
 - One KC suggested that it would be important to include fishermen in the conversation who were fishing before MPAs were put in place so they could speak to socioeconomic and port community well-being before and after MPA implementation.
- One KC questioned whether the focus group approach is the best way to collect information about port community well-being, and shared that they saw potentially more value in a project that would do on-the-ground assessment of port amenities and capabilities. They suggested

that fishermen might not all have complete knowledge of the different infrastructure, services, and markets available in their ports.

- Another KC discussed the importance of aligning focus groups with other fishing community research that is happening in California ports (e.g., ongoing work to catalog available infrastructure, services, governance structures in dozens of California ports). They suggested that there may be fruitful avenues for bringing together focus group data with on-the-ground assessments.
 - Recommendations made to consider how this project related to other policy-related work specific to California coastal and fisheries management, including but not limited to the implementation of the 2018 Marine Life Management Act Master Plan.

The current project design which uses focus group discussions as the primary method to engage with fishing communities can be effective, however, fishermen's willingness to participate, ensuring inclusive representation of participants within each port/port grouping, etc. are some of the potential challenges that will need to be considered.

- Based on past experiences with the MLPA Initiative and MPA planning/designation process, concerns were raised that fishermen may be skeptical about or uninterested in engaging in this project.
- There was general agreement that inviting fishermen to participate in focus groups during the height of their respective fishing seasons would be difficult. One KC suggested that focus groups be combined with other fisheries meetings to help maximize participation.
- There were several requests for clarification about specific aspects of the project design, which are discussed in further detail in subsequent sections, below.

Draft 'Port Community Well-being Assessment Tool'

The first iteration of the draft assessment tool offers a good starting place for collecting quantitative information to assess port community well-being, however, continued fine-tuning is necessary to improve the clarity of questions being asked to help minimize variability and increase the accuracy and consistency of responses received.

- There was general support expressed for the overall design of the draft assessment tool, with a number of KCs sharing that most of the questions included in the draft assessment tool were clear and understandable.
 - A number of KCs expressed concerns that the draft questions may be too broad, which could introduce more variability in the answers received (due to increased interpretation). To support richer conversations, multiple KCs suggested improving the specificity of certain questions (e.g., "Overall, how would you rate the quality of the markets to which fishermen from your port are able to sell their catch?") and including sub-criteria (e.g., price, ease of use, stability/consistency, diversity/choice) to improve understanding and consistency in responses received.

- One KC discussed that given the question design we should use the term “rate” instead of “rank” when asking participants to evaluate the likert scale questions.
- One KC suggested that the project team reach out to more members of the fishing community to request their input about what factors they think are important to consider about community well-being.
- When reviewing the order of the questions included in the draft assessment tool, there was general support to keep the MPA and well-being questions separate (i.e., ask all well-being questions first, then ask all MPA-related questions). Several KCs added that the well-being questions may provide useful context for responses to the MPA questions.
 - One KC expressed it may be difficult for focus group participants to tease out socioeconomic impacts specific to MPAs when considering all large-scale management actions that have affected fishing communities (e.g., rockfish conservation area).
 - One KC suggested it might be fruitful to integrate the well-being questions with the MPA questions, for example to start on a topic and then drill down to how MPAs related to that topic. Others were not sure about whether integrating the questions in that way would be effective.
 - Additional questions and concerns were raised regarding focus group participants’ ability to convey the perspectives of their port rather than individual priorities or needs.
 - One KC commented that fishermen typically feel more comfortable speaking about their personal experiences then speaking on behalf of their port community.
- Some KCs highlighted the need for clear messaging about what the draft assessment tool is and what type of data it will collect, given that not all components of the fishing community will be present during each focus group. Using the term ‘port community’ may be misleading, given that the project only focuses on one or two parts of the fishing community as a whole (i.e., processors and buyers will not be part of focus group discussions). There were suggestions to give the tool and project a more focused name.

Focus Group Design

Focus groups have increased potential to gather information that is credible, reliable, and representative of California commercial and CPFV fishing communities if each focus group includes a diverse array of fishermen that are reflective of their respective ports (e.g. size of fishing operations, production levels, involvement in a range of fisheries, number of years fishing, demographics [age, gender] etc.).

- KCs expressed general support for using electronic clickers (either via cell phones or a separate handheld technology) to quickly collect and compare responses without influence from others.
- KCs highlighted the importance of including focus group participants who can speak to both pre- and post-MPA conditions, have a strong understanding of port-community wide perspectives, and who rely on fisheries that occur within state waters, which have been more

greatly affected by MPAs. It was also suggested to include younger fishermen as well as those who participate in a wide range of fisheries active in each port to capture diverse perspectives.

- KCs requested clarification about the process for determining the number of fishermen invited to each focus group and the process for recruiting focus group participants. One KC suggested varying the size of focus groups based on port community size and cautioned against holding large group discussions (e.g., more than 10-12 participants).
- One KC expressed support for focus groups as an efficient alternative to one-on-one interviews.
- Several KCs expressed concern that the current focus group design only includes commercial fishermen. Due to constraints in the scope of the project, CPFV discussions are slated to take place in a smaller group setting (2-4 fishermen) and will not involve the use of clickers. Some KCs highlighted the importance of collecting comparable quantitative and qualitative data across both commercial and CPFV fishing communities.
 - Several KCs asked about how the project was planning to consider fishermen who fish commercially and also operate CPFVs. It was highlighted that the responses of these 'hybrid' fishermen in a focus group setting could be affected depending on which perspective they are asked to answer from.
 - Several KCs highlighted there is a larger CPFV presence in some ports and that these ports might benefit from the inclusion of more CPFV operators than the proposed 2-4 participants.

Port Groupings

Recognizing the need to be efficient with time and available resources, the approach taken to grouping ports together (i.e., those ports that are geographically close to one another) may influence the quality and fine-scale nature of the data collected during each focus group with commercial fishermen and/or discussions with CPFV owner/operators.

- KCs noted that several of the port groupings defined by the project team (see materials listed on page 1, 'Port Groupings Summary') may make it difficult to comprehensively capture an accurate assessment of port community well-being and/or socioeconomic impacts due to MPAs. When only holding one discussion for commercial and CPFV fishermen respectively across ports in an area, the subtle nuances of needs and priorities between ports may be lost by grouping ports together.
- One KC suggested the number of ports / port groups currently outlined (24 in total) be reduced to make additional project resources available to support discussions with CPFV operators.

Data Analysis

The visual display and presentation of the quantitative data collected during the focus groups via the clicker technology may influence the nature and framing of the group's discussion.

- A number of KCs expressed concern that individual ratings would not be presented but rather be merged into one rating for reporting and discussion purposes. This average rating would not demonstrate the full variety of perceptions within each focus group.
 - To help address this, one KC suggested that an instrument could be designed to identify/contextualize the perspectives of individuals (e.g., their experience level, demographics, etc.).
- Some KCs expressed concern that presenting ratings as numerical responses or indices on their own could be misleading without the underlying qualitative data related to context, and suggested that the project team be careful about the presentation of results (i.e., provide explanations/caveats about what the numbers may or may not reflect).
- One KC suggested that a summary of responses to individual questions be made available in addition to the overall ratings of each index (e.g., well-being [social, economic, environmental] and MPA).
- There was a suggestion to report trends in the responses based on participant age and other demographic information.
- KCs were invited to provide additional feedback on data analysis methods via the online questionnaire or via direct discussions with members of the project team.

Communicating Project Findings

Utilizing a web-based platform to share the final products and outputs of this project can offer an interesting, informative, and interactive user experience and can be more useful than a static report.

- Broad support was shared for the project team's suggestion to develop a web-based tool similar to the [Fisheries Data Explorer](#) to communicate the project's key findings.
- Several KCs expressed their excitement about the idea to communicate stories through the data. The interactive approach would make the information accessible and data could be made available to fishing communities for purposes beyond MPA monitoring.
- KCs provided several other suggestions for ways to communicate findings from this project directly to key audiences (e.g., fishermen, decision makers, fisheries managers), including presentations, verbal reports, social media, newspaper, port association meetings, and other direct forms of outreach.

Looking Ahead

- The project team requested additional feedback and guidance via the online questionnaire through February 21, 2020. The invitation for input was extended via email to those KCs unable to attend the webinar.
 - A key themes summary capturing suggestions and ideas shared during the webinar and via the online questionnaire will be developed by the project team and made available to KCs for accuracy prior to posting on the project team website.

- Several KCs expressed their appreciation for being consulted about the design of this study at this early stage in the draft assessment tool's development, and for the efforts of fishery managers in seeking to better understand California's fishing communities.
 - There was interest expressed in reconvening the KCs after the pilot port focus group (anticipated for April 2020), and one KC expressed interest in being involved with fishing community engagement once focus group planning was underway.

For more information about the webinar or the MPA Human Uses project, please visit mpahumanuses.com or contact hello@strategicearth.com.