

Fisheries management

Only partnerships work

The experience of Barbados throws light on fisheries management plans, and not just for Small Island Developing States

The need to introduce Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) was first appreciated by eastern Caribbean fisheries authorities in the early 1980s. Fisheries are important socially and culturally, if not economically, in these Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

The fishing industry of Barbados, the most eastern of the islands in the Lesser Antilles chain, is small-scale and based largely on the migratory pelagic fishes such as flying fish, dolphin, tunas and billfish that traverse its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Due to their movement during some parts of their life cycles, these fish resources are shared with several other marine jurisdictions and countries.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the CARICOM Fisheries Resource Assessment and Management Programme (CFRAMP) assisted in producing a draft FMP for Barbados to meet the requirements of a 1993 Fisheries Act which took the provisions of the Law of the Sea into account. The Fisheries Act requires the Chief Fisheries Officer to develop fishery-specific FMPs and keep them under review. According to the Act, each fishery plan must include:

- The present state of fishery exploitation
- Management and development objectives
- Management and development measures and policies
- Statistical information requirements
- Specifications of licensing and limitations to fishing

The work of developing the initial draft plans was confined largely to fisheries consultants and the fisheries officers of the Fisheries Division in the Ministry of Agriculture. However, the Fisheries Act requires that the Minister appoint a Fisheries Advisory Committee to advise him on the development and management of fisheries.

In the absence of functioning fisherfolk organizations at the time, members from the fishing industry were selected on the basis of their personal expertise through an informal system of peer recommendations and shortlisting. The appointed members of the Fisheries Advisory Committee were the Chief Fisheries Officer as Chairman, an offshore fisherman, an inshore fisherman, a boatowner, a fish processor, a fisheries consultant, and the Deputy Director of the Coastal Zone Management Unit. Early in 1996, the newly formed Fisheries Advisory Committee faced the task of completing the FMP through consultation as promoted in the Fisheries Act.

The Committee anticipated that several months of private and public meetings would be required to re-formulate the draft FMP. The Act recommended that the fishing industry and other stakeholders have a meaningful say in determining the content of the FMP. These are the people who will be most affected by the plan, whether it is successful or not. It is widely recognized that FMPs will succeed only if the fishing industry is an integral part of plan formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Legal guidance

Clearly defining the task and then tackling it methodically was important. The law gave guidance on content, and the Fisheries Advisory Committee decided on

a sequence of steps, each with feedback and a schedule, as follows:

1. Fisheries Division formulates the draft FMP
2. Fishery Advisory Committee (FAC) appraises the draft FMP
3. Fishing industry and other stakeholders review the draft FMP in public
4. Minister approves the final draft FMP (after several reviews and revisions)
5. Fisheries Division and fishing industry implement and monitor the FMP
6. Stakeholders and Fisheries Division evaluate and improve the FMP

The circulation of the Fisheries Advisory Committee's draft FMP for public review stimulated active and constructive participation. We intentionally went beyond the fishing industry, since the benefits from managing fishery resources must be shared among the general public. All taxpayers share the costs of fisheries management, and there are many interactions with stakeholders in other sectors of the economy such as tourism and agriculture. Therefore, special

attention was paid to coastal zone issues and inter-sectoral linkages.

Public meetings were held in both central and community locations. Although the Fisheries Division took the lead, members of the FAC also attended the site meetings. Copies of the draft Plan were distributed, and the public at large informed that written comments were welcome. However, more emphasis was placed on receiving the oral comments of fisherfolk at the informal field meetings. All issues affecting the fishing industry were open for discussion, whether in the draft Plan or not, so that the stakeholders set the agenda for the review. From the public review process, we got additional ideas to incorporate into the Plan. We were told, often in no uncertain terms, which were the priority areas and burning issues.

The Fisheries Division and Fisheries Advisory Committee revised the FMP to include the recommendations of stakeholders, whether they agreed with the government or not. The fact that the FMP was now the people's plan made it more acceptable to the political directorate.

Legal regulations

When legal regulations are drafted on the basis of the plan, Ministers must feel confident that the fishery management measures will be supported by the ordinary man in the street. It was easy to

persuade the fisheries Minister to approve the plan for implementation as required by law.

The first FMP for Barbados was approved in 1997, and the regulations to give effect to the agreed upon management measures became law in 1998. Meanwhile, the Fisheries Division started a public education programme to remind stakeholders and the public about the benefits of fisheries management and the important role individuals and groups can play to help it succeed. The majority of participants in the fishing industry and the public are unfamiliar with fisheries management planning. The first plan was intended primarily as a communication and education document. In this respect, it has been quite successful.

The legally required information for each of the eight fisheries to be managed was put in a format that was easy to follow even if one knew little about the fishing industry. The first half of the plan document gave a general overview of the fishing industry so the reader could place the plans into context. Issues regarding fisheries development, which is of prime interest to people in the industry, potential investors, banks and donor agencies were placed in a separate section. Each fishery-specific plan follows a common layout and minimizes the use of technical or scientific language. For each, there is

also an implementation plan that seeks to address the main issues confronting the particular fishery. This layout is intended to facilitate quick access to the essential information. A glossary is appended to explain some essential technical terms and management concepts.

The fishery-specific plan sections are: Target Species; Catch and Effort Trend; By-catch; Regulatory History; Ecology; Management Policies and Objectives; Description of Fishery; Selected Management Approaches; Management Unit Development Constraints; Resource Status; and Development Opportunities.

The plan has also been effective in having its contents translated into legal regulations intended to manage the fishery. However, compliance with the regulations has been mixed largely due to the inability of the small staff of the Fisheries Division to follow up with the technical support required to establish some of the fishing gear measures for responsible fishing.

Collaborations

The Fisheries Division has been vigorously promoting and facilitating the formation of fisherfolk organizations in order to improve participation and collaboration in the process. Even though fisherfolk organize themselves mainly for income-generating development, rather than fisheries resource conservation or

management, the collective action is mutually beneficial for information exchange and exploring shared interests with other stakeholders and government.

The planning process recently introduced in Barbados has provided a variety of lessons that may apply elsewhere. First, the fishing industry is not familiar with fishery management issues and techniques. Therefore, it can not be assumed that Fisheries Advisory Committee members drawn from the industry, or the public, are in a position to contribute to the scientific and very technical aspects of the plan. However, their contributions on other aspects are invaluable.

The planning process brought to the fore the wide array of responsibilities of the Fisheries Division, and the urgent need for attention to many of these issues. It, therefore, underscored the limited institutional capacity of the Fisheries Division to address these issues expeditiously with its currently scarce resources (human, physical and financial).

The selected approach starts with a rational framework that describes, in simple terms, what is known and generally agreed upon by the management stakeholders. It identifies desired end points and the approaches to getting there, based on the best available and shared information.

In this manner, the foundation is laid for proceeding with management actions that are reasonable and generally acceptable even before there is a well-established scientific basis for them. These types of approaches, which rely less on large quantities of scientific information, and more on negotiated objectives derived from modest science and shared perspectives, are perhaps better suited to small-scale fisheries management, given the limited capacities of most fisheries management units in SIDS.

The Barbadian approach is precautionary in first setting up the management policies and objectives with simple, achievable steps to meet them. It is not based upon conducting stock assessment and detailed scientific research as an essential prerequisite. It, therefore, includes

obtaining scientific information as management proceeds.

At public meetings, the industry tended to focus more on the problems associated with infrastructure and economic development, than on management or conservation issues. In preparing the FMP to meet local needs and expectations, it was decided to explicitly include fisheries development.

The close and complementary link between management and development was thought to be an important perspective in the context of promoting sustainable resource use in a SIDS. People and politicians in developing countries expect management to include both conservation and development. However, the bias towards capital development is based on an implicit assumption of continued resource availability. This can be a dangerously incorrect assumption.

These lessons reiterate the need for increased and continuous information exchange amongst stakeholders in the fisheries management process. This is necessary to bring about more informed, meaningful and effective participation by the fishing industry. It will also strengthen the capability of the State to manage the fisheries successfully through collaboration and co-operation, rather than command and control. Indeed, exchange of information between the fishing industry and fishery managers is one of the most critical dimensions of fisheries planning. This is especially so in countries like ours unable to engage in elaborate fisheries research. Fisheries authorities must recognize that they need to form partnerships with the people in the fishing industry, whether the process is called co-management, community-based management or something else. ♦

This article is by Patrick McConney,
Chief Fisheries Officer, Fisheries
Division, Barbados (email:
fishbarbados@caribsurf.com)