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Local voices to the surface**Andy Inglis, Hugh Govan and Susan Guy****• Background**

The fisheries around Scotland's coasts have traditionally been managed by the government Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Local fishers are represented, to varying extents, through associations and organisations. Community or local participation is touted as important by certain authorities¹. A number of authorities and statutory agencies already claim to involve local communities in local decision-making. But in reality this usually consists of advertisements in the press, written requests for comment to representatives of user groups and the occasional questionnaire survey.

Solway Firth Partnership

In response to the need for more integrated coastal zone management, a number of voluntary coastal fora have been established, particularly in the major firths or large inlets that dominate Scotland's coastline. These fora aim to integrate the views of a wide range of stakeholders in the design and implementation of coastal management strategies.

The Solway Firth Partnership is one such forum that was established in the Solway Firth, a large inlet bounded to the South by England and to the north by South West Scotland. It was established in 1994 to develop a joint management strategy compatible with the sustainable development

of the area. The partnership comprises representatives of statutory and non-statutory bodies, economic interests, users and local communities interested in the sustainable use or development of the area.

In 1996, we were asked by the Solway Firth Partnership to design and facilitate regional workshops to enable local people to present their ideas and develop action plans to inform the development of fisheries management plans. This paper provides a brief overview of the process we designed and carried out to assist the Solway Firth Partnership to run effective open meetings in three coastal towns: Gretna, Wigtown and Workington in the summer of 1996.

• The approach

The Solway Firth Partnership was composed principally of authorities, agencies and representatives of user and interest groups. The formally agreed route for interaction with local people is either through fishing representatives on sector specific working groups or through attendance at yearly conferences.

The general agency understanding of public participation is influenced by the prior history of carrying out statutory consultation procedures for planning activities and dealing with often hostile members of the public. Thus, usually proposed methods of public consultation centred on questionnaires, the production of a newsletter and conference type meetings. From the perspective of the local fishers these approaches were not working in ways which were meaningful or useful to them. A fisherman from Gretna

¹ Throughout this article we refer to the responsible government bodies and local planning authorities as 'authorities' and statutory designated advisory and watch-dog bodies and NGOs as 'agencies'.

explained: *We felt there was a lack of local consultation for people who are living and working and have roots in the Solway. We would like more consultation. We know a little bit more about what's going on here than perhaps the pressure bodies.*

In an effort to introduce a new approach to the consultative process, we facilitated three public workshops at sites around the Solway Firth. We realised that we were working within a flawed process and that we had been invited to assist the Partnership at a late stage in the project. Because of these limitations and constraints, we negotiated exactly the ground rules for the meetings and publicity, what the outputs would be and how they would be used.

Participatory appraisal

For the public workshops, a participatory appraisal (PA) process was designed. Agency and local authority staff were trained in the facilitation skills (e.g. mapping and action-planning processes) required for the proposed public meetings. An important part of the training event was for the participants to assess their own attitudes, behaviours and roles as facilitators, rather than as agency and authority officials, educators and environmental experts.

The training involved the development of clear, realistic and achievable objectives which would provide the structure and focus for the open meetings. The objectives were:

- To bring together a variety of people and views;
- To assist people in the locality to analyse aspects of the marine and coastal situation and their feelings about the future; and,
- To start a process by which people may come to a better understanding of each others' ideas and concerns regarding the future of the Solway Firth.

We designed a process called 'locality mapping' which builds upon mapping, a well known PA tool. This assisted people: to identify, share and record their ideas and views, prioritise issues and work as a group to develop and record ideas for how they would address their issues. Locality maps were completed at each of the three open meetings which were held over a ten day period.

Each meeting lasted three hours. Participants worked in small groups to analyse aspects of their marine and coastal areas. They mapped the area where they live and work. Everyone had the opportunity to express, explain and record their ideas and views. As a group they scored the relative importance of each of the issues raised.

The participants recorded information directly onto their maps. Everyone had the opportunity to look at, and discuss, the maps generated by other working groups. Each working group developed action plans which described which issues could be addressed, why, how, by whom and when. After each group had explored the issues fully, a plenary session was held where the groups presented their findings and action plans to each other. Finally, reports were generated that reproduced the original material. These had no external analysis of the unedited material describing the marine and coastal situation in Wigtown, Gretna and Workington as defined by those people with whom the facilitation team met.

Some issues raised

The issues confronting local resource users are perhaps best described in their own words. Tables 1 and 2 are extracts from the matrices generated by two different working groups. The first was recorded by a working group of fishers and the second was recorded by a group composed mainly of agency representatives.

Table 1. An extract from the action plan developed by one fishers' working group

CHANGE	WHERE	WHY	HOW	WHO	WHEN
Removal of threat to Annan, Royal burgh fishing rights	Annan, Royal Burgh territory	Cultural and historical rights to be kept in perpetuity for local people. Distinctive activity of great interest to tourist. Defining point of the area.	Local people must be notified and consulted prior to sale of land/ rights or any change of legislation. Recognition of rights by all fishing interests on or near Solway. LEAVE US ALONE. Stop threatening us. We have a right to exist.	Riparian business interests, legislative bodies, Solway Firth Partnership; Scottish Natural Heritage.	NOW!
Improvement of fish stocks: spring - run salmon and sea trout.	All of Solway estuary.	Beneficial for all fisherman and conservation benefits.	Control of afforestation; drainage; pollution; sewage; restocking; change law to allow fines to be used directly to mend damage done to river - Restocking.	Forestry Commission; farmers; industry; local authorities; Government; Scottish Office; more action from Environmental Agencies	ASAP ¹
Return of rights to local people to fish local rivers. Affordable access for pensioners	Annan River	People feel aggravated the local river is out of bounds to locals. Only the rich visitors can afford to fish. Only town in SW. Scotland not to have control of fishing rights within Burgh area. Few benefits to locals of visitors coming.	Investigation of legality of sale of fishing rights. Details of sale (nobody knows). Concessions by present owners to allow pensioners and juveniles to fish. Other timeshare operations allow one day's fishing to locals.	Local councillors; Present owners	ASAP

¹ as soon as possible

Table 2. Extract of an action plan developed by a working group comprised of agency representatives.

CHANGE	WHERE	WHY	HOW	WHO	WHEN
Reduce erosion	Gravel and sand extraction; visitors damaging dunes	Can be achieved soon. Done without permission.	Planting issue; inform crown commissioners; enforcement; strategy/ policy; signs to encourage and educate.	Planners Public; farmers; us	ASAP
Establish coastal footpath (long distance)	Along coast, both sides of Solway.	Tourism, link nature conservation sites (birds); input the money generated into farm economy.	Without demolishing dykes or causing conflict with dogs/ stock; incentives to owners; Public backing	Landowners must agree; Council; dedicated person to plan and implement	soon-ish
Loss of village and town local identity	Almost every settlement	Strong identity-attracts tourists; sense of belonging for residents.	Planning policy and residents	Council	

• Strengths of the approach

Agency staff often find it difficult, if not impossible, to talk or negotiate with fishers. Likewise, fishers often find the methods, venues and timing of agency-initiated events intimidating and difficult to follow. Some of the strengths of the PA workshops were:

- they demonstrated to agency people that meetings can be run in effective and meaningful ways while providing outputs which are documented, specific and practical;
- the informal, neutral venue, facilitates discussion between different interest groups that may never usually meet;
- the participants record their own ideas and views in their own language. The process can be documented and distributed to the participants and other interested parties; and,
- a video was used to document the process and some of the outcomes. This helped to describe the events to others who did not attend the meetings.

Three comments from participants highlight some of the other benefits from the process. A regional environmental agency official was impressed by the process: *I was sceptical when we were being trained about how it would actually work but..., the way we dealt with the subjects was fantastic. Better than standing up on stage being hailed abuse at.* An Environmental Planning Manager from a local authority had a similar, positive experience: *I found the process difficult at first but once we got over that initial hurdle it all went really well. There have been lots of good ideas..... we actually got somewhere...good things came out.. certainly detail that I was not aware of 50 miles away.* An environmental agency official found the mapping process helpful: *by focusing on a map discussion is specific and therefore the ideas and solutions tend to be achievable.*

Involving local people, not just their representatives

Prior to these workshops, user groups and other interests were usually represented by officials. This system, as in many other areas, did not seem to be working. Several of the local fishers who participated found the PA approach a positive experience. A young fisherman from Gretna explained: *I felt it gave people who wouldn't speak in a regular kind of meeting a chance to give their views. I really enjoyed it.*

We had anticipated, and prepared for, the presence of two main types of saboteurs: officials of some of the partnership agencies and the single issue activists. Officials wanted to ensure that only the 'right' issues were raised. We devised a group forming exercise to reduce the chances of them dominating the discussion. As officials often live outside fishing localities, we formed working groups based on where people live. This gave fishers the chance to raise specific issues with out being dominated by agency agendas.

We had another strategy for the single issue activists who often come armed with 'props': dossiers, files, documents, maps, newspaper cuttings, etc.. If given the opportunity, they will start to quote from these and hand them around. As we were using big pieces of paper for mapping, we asked everybody to put all their things under the table, thus creating a level playing field. This was appreciated by a fisherman from Annan who exclaimed: *I am delighted to be given the opportunity to contribute to the Solway Firth Partnership agenda. We felt that we had been hijacked before by certain interest groups that are more vociferous than us. We are more at peace now that our voices are being listened to*

• Some difficulties

Incorporating PA into existing institutional structures

In this example, PA was incorporated into a project that required 'participation' but where agencies had not given much thought to the implications of what this would involve.

Specifically:

- the processes for involving people needed to have been considered at the project design stage;
- mechanisms should have been devised for incorporating more effectively local people's ideas and views;
- commitment and resources should have been secured at the outset of the project to enable meaningful follow-up to the public consultation; and,
- approaches were needed to overcome the reticence of the more conservative of the partnership agencies to accept anything more than token public consultation.

PA and Scottish fishing communities

Designing appropriate participatory processes to achieve realistic objectives has great potential in the Scottish coastal zone. This approach enabled discussion about resource allocation *within* specific resource user groups and facilitated interactions *between* different user groups. A fisherman from Annan appreciated the inter-group co-operation: *Discussions being made affect our livelihood. We would like to have a say in any changes. We would like someone from our side with hands on experience involved in a management committee.*

PA approaches, specifically diagramming tools such as mapping, can be well suited to resource planning and management situations. They are uniquely appropriate to resource allocation issues and are not threatening where people from differing backgrounds are coming together to discuss and work through complex issues. Furthermore, they help keep the discussion of issues specific rather than in terms of abstract concepts. Whilst in this instance they were successfully used in regional meetings, their value, and the number of participating stakeholders, increases if used at a more local level (getting out to where there are people e.g. boats, shops and pubs).

Hitting the rocks

Based on our involvement with this project, we recommended to the Solway Firth Partnership that participatory management appraisals (i.e. follow-ups) should be held in 'hot spot' localities identified at the regional workshops. But over a year later, the participatory process has not been carried forward as planned. This appears to be because dominant voices, both in and around the Partnership, were uncomfortable with the open agenda of the regional meetings and have blocked the local-level events and meaningful follow-up.

Our experience has shown us that working with PA in the British fishing sector requires all the usual aspects of best practice. It also requires great efforts to ensure that the many local voices are heard above a few, powerful external actors who determine the outcomes. A fisherman from Gretna was optimistic about the future however: *I felt today's meeting has taken a lot of the mistrust out of things from what has gone on before. The users have never been considered before and today this was brought to the surface. ...We should all work together and I'm sure this is going to come.*

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