

A Critical Review of the Implementation of the Management for the Soufriere Marine Management Area: A Case Study

KEITH NICHOLS, SUSANNA DE BEAUVILLE-SCOTT, and
SARAH GEORGE
Department of Fisheries
Castries, St. Lucia

ABSTRACT

Resolution of conflict must be seen as the key to the successful development of any management plan if sustainable use of resources is to be achieved. The mechanism by which this can be attained becomes more complex and involved as the number of stakeholders increase, and where also these resources are finite. The Soufriere area in St. Lucia is a prime example of this, where greater use is being made of finite marine resources by an increasing number of stakeholders, making implementation of the new management plan a difficult and lengthy process.

The Soufriere Marine Management Area (SMMA) was established out of a series of consultations between stakeholders in an attempt to resolve user conflicts and to put in place a management regime which would allow for continued sustainable use of the marine environment. Implementation, however, has been more difficult than expected due to an apparent lack of involvement of certain user groups during the consultation phase of the program, who now feel that the new measures being put into place did not auger well for their continued survival.

As a means of ensuring equity it has become necessary to revisit the process of consultation among smaller groups and to review the zoning in order to ensure that these new concerns are addressed. The success of this venture is dependent on the mutual satisfaction of all stakeholders who must benefit from the management plan. It is clear that the mistakes made in the early stages will provide a learning platform from which other similar exercises might be patterned.

Keywords: Resolution of Conflict, Soufriere Marine Management Area, Consultation

INTRODUCTION

The resolution of conflict, particularly where it concerns the use of natural resources, is not always easily achievable. Complications make this even more difficult where resources are finite and space limitations determine user priorities. This has been shown to be the case in the Soufriere Mangament Area (SMMA) where stakeholder participation has not been complete.

The history and nature of the resource use conflicts in the Soufriere Marine Management Area are described in George (1994) who also highlights the main issues surrounding these conflicts. George goes further to describe the initiative spear-headed through the tripartite effort made by the Soufriere Regional

Development Foundation (SRDF), the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and the Department of Fisheries (DOF) in which all recognized stakeholders were invited to participate in an exercise aimed at resolving the issues. At that time it was recognized that the top down approach of the management authorities had only served to exacerbate user conflicts by not facilitating equitable arrangements through the process.

The actions taken by the authorities and described by George (1994) and by George *et al* (1994) were considered to be in keeping with the global movement to protect environmentally sensitive resources. This meant the establishment of Marine Reserves (MRs) and Fishing Priority Areas (FPAs) in 1986, which failed to have the desired effect largely due to a lack of demarcation and effective management. The lack of consideration for these protected areas was merely symptomatic of a greater problem, as will be seen later in this document.

The stakeholder participatory exercise, as initiated by the SRDF, CANARI and the DOF, brought together all user groups and management authorities to look at new ways to providing solutions for the equitable use of the coastal marine area. This was achieved through a series of consultations held over a period of just over a year, through which an agreement was reached. The management agreement was subsequently approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of St. Lucia in early 1994. It was proven later that the zoning plan established as a result of these consultations did not adequately reflect the interest of all user groups. However, this was identified by George (1994) and George *et al* (1994) who noted that the declaration of marine reserves and fishing priority areas did not fully cater to the needs of the trap fishers and the pleasure yachting community.

The resurgence of conflicts, this time between the trap fishers and the new management authority (a body comprising representatives from all major stakeholders) regarding use of the marine reserves, and the increasing concern of local restaurateurs that their business has suffered as a result of the zoning, made it necessary to revisit the consultative process. This time outstanding issues are being reviewed by the affected user groups in an attempt to finalize, once and for all, demarcation within the Soufriere Management Area.

BASELINE STATUS

The Soufriere area is one that is very rich in agricultural fertility, tourism potential and coastal fishery resources. Traditionally agriculture and fishing have provided the two main sources of employment and income (George, 1994). However, over the past decade or so there has been rapid growth in the tourism industry. This growth has given rise to the increasing conflicts between users of the area. The traditional users: fishermen, have been faced with tampering of their fish traps and yachts anchoring in prime areas used by seine fishermen. Hoteliers in the area argued that the yachters brought income to their businesses

and the area in general and so should be able to anchor where it is convenient for them, despite clashes with the fishermen. To resolve the escalating conflicts, three (3) Fishing Priority Areas (FPAs) were established in 1986 in local major beach seining bays (George, 1994), which required all other activities to give way to fishing. In addition, that same year, most of the reef in the area was declared as Marine Reserves (MRs) in an effort to protect areas of greatest reef diversity and productivity (George, 1994).

The MRs and FPAs did not resolve the problems, in fact the conflicts began to escalate. This resulted since yachts continued to anchor in FPAs due to the lack of clear demarcation and an alternate anchoring ground. Trap fishermen were squeezed by the establishment of MRs and thus continued to fish illegally in these areas. Divers continued to tamper with fish traps and a host of other conflicts arose since all the needs of the users had not been adequately addressed by merely establishing MRs and FPAs.

SMMA REVISITED

The Agreement and its Implementation

In 1992, the joint effort by the SRDF, CANARI and the DOF devised a new approach to define and resolve the conflicts in the Soufriere area (George, 1994). The process ensured wide-scale multiple representation by resource users, other interest groups and government agencies at a series of consultations which allowed all users to express and demonstrate concerns and voice recommendations for use of the area (George, 1994). The result was a "Preliminary Agreement of the Use and Management of Marine and Coastal Resources in the Soufriere Region" (SRDF, 1993) which was felt to reflect the spirit of compromise and goodwill which guided the consultations. This agreement apportioned the coastal area in such a way as to allow for a myriad of coastal activities to co-exist, facilitating all users (George, 1994). The agreed zonation consisted of five (5) zones: 1) MRs, 2) FPAs, 3) Recreational Areas, 4) Mooring Areas and 5) Multiple Use Areas.

This agreement was approved by the government after being presented to the Cabinet of Ministers in March, 1994, by technical staff involved in the process. Later that year a team of regional experts with practical experience in marine protected area management, along with representatives of the relevant agencies and stakeholders, met to share their expertise and knowledge and to develop a management plan for the SMMA. Today this plan is complete and awaiting approval by the Cabinet of Ministers.

Under the agreement a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was appointed. The TAC consists of representatives of key agencies and users and is responsible for the overall coordination and integrated planning of the area. A Technical Working Group (TWG) established by the TAC is responsible for providing technical advise and guidance on everyday implementation. In August,

1995, a manager and four (4) rangers were employed to form the core staff of the SMMA. Before the hiring of this manager, the implementation and day to day running of the SMMA was the responsibility of a temporary manager attached to the project from the French Mission for Technical and Cultural Cooperation.

As planned, the infrastructure of the SMMA consists of demarcation buoys and signs for MRs, demarcation signs for FPAs, mooring buoys in mooring areas, information signs at key points, a tender jetty in the north of Anse Chastenet Bay and the Hummingbird area, and an SMMA office and souvenir stall. In December, 1994, Halas and Manta Ray systems were installed as demarcation and mooring buoys respectively, in support of the zonation plan. The installation was carried out by John Halas, a Key Largo Marine Sanctuary biologist, and his crew.

In February, 1995, demarcation signs and interpretation signs were erected throughout the SMMA with assistance from the Environmental and Coastal Resources Project. Negotiations are currently in progress to construct the tender jetty at Anse Chastenet and the Hummingbird area and the souvenir stall on the Soufriere town waterfront.

With the demarcation of the area complete, a management plan before the Cabinet of Ministers, and core staff in place, the SMMA was indeed well poised for an official launching by mid 1995.

Impacts of the SMMA

The Soufriere Marine Management Area was launched in June of 1995, an event which signified the end of the series of negotiations which had established the original zoning agreement. However, at this inaugural exercise it became apparent that the agreement fell short of expectations. Featured strongly among those who appeared threatened by the agreement were trap fishers who felt excluded by virtue of the lack of space allocated them and, secondly, the local restaurateurs who felt that the displacement of yachts from areas adjacent to their establishments had resulted in a decline in business. Private recreational and commercial boat owners also expressed concerns about their exclusion from the whole SMMA process. We shall consider each of these scenarios separately and evaluate the effect that proposed changes will have on the existing SMMA structure.

a) Despite the fishermen being well represented at the consultations, it appears that the smaller trap fishing group did not participate merely because they did not feel threatened at the time and thought this to be yet another futile effort to deal with the problems at hand. The fishermen's representatives on the TAC have also failed to provide the critical flow of information between the user group and management authority and may not truly represented the interests of all sub-sets of this group. This has led to a situation where fish traps

and nets are still set in MRs, leading to pressure on the resources and confiscation of the gear by the authorities.

Subsequent attempts at resolving this situation have led to the allocation of additional area for multiple use by reducing from that allocated to the marine reserves. However, fish traps and nets are still being set in MRs since these fishermen are apparently yet unconvinced of their benefits for fish biomass. During discussions with trap fishermen it became quite evident that the majority of them understand the reasoning for establishing MRs, however they have chosen the immediate benefits of fishing in the MRs and the eventual devastation of the fishery over long term benefits. The social need for feeding one's family today over feeding one's future generation is a very compelling one. As Sandersen (1995) notes, "...the fishermen reacted strongly to this [being excluded from the MRs] and wanted the "white and rich" tourist industry to give some concessions by also excluding divers from some MRs.

Inadequate information dissemination has compounded the problem, creating a considerable level of ignorance regarding the rules which govern activities within the SMMA based on a general lack of necessary information transfer to stakeholders and the wider community. Throughout the consultative process, public education and information transfer should have featured strongly: a serious shortcoming which is now a current focus for the management authority.

It is likely that significant changes might have to be made to the current zoning in reflecting the needs of the trap fishers and recreational boaters. There is a dominating argument among the trap fishing fraternity that the best fishing areas have been converted into marine reserves for the sole benefit of the recreational diving sector. This creates the realization that, in the zeal to maximize the protection of such a fragile ecosystem, one of the principal goals of sustainable development the maintenance of livelihoods of traditional users, may have been overlooked. At present, some additional area has been allocated to the trap fishers, together with fresh consultations planned in order to generate and ratify a revised zoning arrangement.

b) Two waterfront restaurateurs in the north of the Soufriere Bay, claim to be affected by the current relocation of yachts from a FPA adjacent to their properties. This area is one of the prime fishing locations and has been a crux of the conflict between fishers and yachters for a very long time. Conflicts over this area are so great that it has become quite clear that the success of the SMMA zoning plan is contingent on fishers having unbridled access to this particular area. With the persistence of this FPA and the present enforcement of laws which dictate it (preventing anchoring or mooring within such areas), restaurant owners have been claiming a loss of business. This problem becomes compounded by a lack of security at the alternative yacht mooring

areas created through the agreement. This situation is considered sufficiently important by the authorities to warrant immediate rectification.

Complaining hoteliers requested moorings be placed along the outskirts of their area to concentrate yachts rather than allowing them to anchor in a scattered fashion in the bay. A survey of the area revealed the impracticality of this due to a rapid increase in depth. The hoteliers had also requested that a small tender jetty be placed adjacent to their property facilitating access by yachts moored in other areas. The jetty, designed by local yachters in such a way as to be removable during high wave action, is being considered for construction by the management authority, a monthly rental to then be collected from the adjacent enterprises who will benefit from its presence.

Plans are now underway to put a security system in place at the main yacht mooring area at Malgretoute. Yachters have complained of break-ins and theft on their boats while unattended. Since they can no longer anchor in front of popular hotel properties, yachters simply by pass the SMMA altogether or stay on board to mind their boats, causing a loss of income to waterfront hoteliers. The management authority feels that the complaints of the hoteliers are valid and hope to rectify these with a security at the Malgretoute mooring area and the provision of the jetty facilities.

c) Another group which have a grouse with the SMMA are the local private boat owners. During initial consultations there was no clear representation by this sector since they were not organized as an association at the time. There was no registration of private boats at the time and despite known private boaters being invited to participate, they did not attend. As a result, persons who have used the area for recreational purposes for many years, feel that they should maintain the right to anchor within the SMMA. At a recent meeting held by the newly formed Day Boat Charters Association (includes private boaters), private boaters voiced their desire to continue to anchor in certain FPAs, predominately on weekends. They suggest that the times they anchor are not prime fishing hours and they would agree to give way to fishing activities when if they should occur.

This issue is also being addressed by the TAC, and the definition of the SMMA as a complete 'no anchoring zone' may well have to be reconsidered. Alternative such as establishing a time-based usage agreement between the two groups are being considered.

Uncontrollable impacts on the SMMA

In late 1994 Tropical Storm Debbie along with the very active hurricane season this year have had a toll on the SMMA. Heavy rains during Tropical Storm Debbie brought down large amounts of silt via rivers and storm gullies into these sensitive coastal waters. Visibility remained poor in usually clear bays for several weeks after the event. Once the waters cleared, signs of coral bleaching were observed, probably due to prolonged periods of reduced light.

This year recent storm activity caused the loss of all demarcation signs, and some of the demarcation and mooring buoys. Coral reefs in the area were again subjected to high silt conditions and suffered severe physical damage. Probably one of the most expensive damages, was that of the main docking pier in the Soufriere Bay.

It is clear that even with the great efforts and planning put into implementation of the SMMA, harsh reality shows that the degree of susceptibility to natural disasters can never be adequately predicted. Presently, efforts are underway to replace infrastructure (including more durable signs) and assess long term reef damages as monitoring in the area continues.

CONCLUSION

As noted by Clark (1992), coastal management boundaries should indeed be issue-based and adaptive. Such has proven to be the case in the SMMA, where the original somewhat naive zoning plan became somewhat impractical upon implementation. It is significant, however, that the broad-based nature of the TAC continues to facilitate the consultative process in its efforts to resolve such issues. This should auger well for the SMMA becoming an effective management area over time.

One of the major shortcomings of the process has been the failure to deal with key issues such as stakeholder and public awareness, accountability of TAC representatives to their wider group, and security needs within the new usage scheme. Although these were identified as issues to be dealt with, their urgency was overlooked. Stakeholder involvement is key not only to developing a management plan but also implementing and adapting it. Sandersen (1995) commented that in the case of the SMMA "paradoxically, the process of increased user-group involvement... causes the fishermen to complain that they should be included more when it comes to meetings, information etc." and that they "...now know how little they understand the mechanics of management, thus some information and involvement creates the need for more information and involvement". Thus the SMMA provides a chance to strengthen the knowledge and effectiveness of the fishers as a group but this must be actively facilitated by the TAC and SMMA management.

In many cases there appears to be a lack of accountability of participants (*i.e.* those present at the consultations and/or those selected as representatives on the TAC) to their community and the people they represent. In many cases these groups are suffering from a lack of effective organization, and therefore their ability to select appropriate representation or maintain the two-way flow of information between the group and the management authority is far from ideal. The SMMA can not succeed unless this is aggressively rectified. If government is to delegate authority to co-management groups such as the TAC the user groups

must be able to fully participate in decision making, along with information dissemination and education.

As indicated by the co-management principles identified by the Coastal Communities Network of Nova Scotia, Canada (Brzeski, 1995), Consensus building where possible through negotiation and compromise (and where impossible through other democratic mechanisms) is a basic requirement for effective co-management. It is essential, therefore, that the continued process for review within the SMMA does not cater to the interests of any one group at the expense of another. This is more likely to be a threat now as fine-tuning of the SMMA is now allowing for review of individual issues, rather than the original multi-dimensional consultations earlier on.

Even with the many set backs, the creation of the SMMA is still considered a major accomplishment and is being used as a base model to expand this type of management to the neighboring Anse la Raye and Canaries coastlines and to the north west coast of the island. Although the process has been a slow and complex one, the fundamental approach of consultation and compromise to the SMMA, and the enthusiasm of the TWG, TAC and management team should be able to guide it towards success.

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