

# Promoting resilience in regional Australian communities:

## A case study of the North Queensland commercial fishing industry



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**Background:** Promoting the sustainability of key existing industries is crucial to the continued development of regional Australia. In doing so, it is important to consider the role of industry workers responsible for engaging with and adhering to sustainability guidelines and practices within these key industries. This is particularly important for industries such as commercial fishing due to the ongoing challenges they face. For example, challenges such as increasing operating costs, complex regulatory systems and the impacts of extreme weather, contribute to downsizing of the industry. **Method:** The findings from the case study discussed have been drawn from an ongoing PhD project investigating the role of commercial fishers in the sustainability of the North Queensland commercial fishing industry. **Results:** Interviews with commercial fishers highlight the perceived lack of genuine involvement of commercial fishers in the development and implementation of industry regulations. From these interviews it was identified that commercial fishers did not feel included in the process of regulation development and implementation or that if they were involved, their input was not genuinely incorporated. Perceived lack of consultation has implications for how regulations are received, adhered to and endorsed by stakeholders. **Discussion:** Based upon the findings of this case study, it is suggested that stakeholders be genuinely involved in the development and implementation of regulations. Genuine consultation processes may enhance the sustainability of key industries such as commercial fishing. For example, it is expected that those who engage in the development and implementation process are more likely to adhere to and engage in sustainability measures and practices leading to improved resilience of the industry.

## Background

- Industries such as commercial fishing play an important role in regional communities<sup>1</sup> and have been identified as key industries in developing sustainable workforces throughout Australia<sup>2</sup>.
- The commercial fishing industry faces numerous challenges that contribute to the downsizing of the industry:
  - Dangerous nature of commercial fishing<sup>3, 4</sup>
  - Increasing operating costs<sup>5</sup>
  - Complex regulatory systems<sup>6</sup>
  - Climate change and extreme weather events<sup>7</sup>
- Despite these challenges, commercial fishers remain motivated to stay in the industry. Commercial fishers tend to perceive their livelihood as part of their identity and their way of life<sup>1, 8, 9</sup>.
- A resilient commercial fishing workforce is therefore important to the existing commercial fishing workforce<sup>9</sup> and to the sustainable regional development of the industry<sup>1, 2</sup>.
- As such, it is important to identify the ways in which the resilience of these industries can be improved.

## Method

- 23 fishers from the Queensland (n = 20) and New South Wales (n = 3) East Coast were interviewed about the challenges facing commercial fishers and the commercial fishing industry.

Age		Gender		Years in industry	Total
Range	M(SD)	Male	Female	M(SD)	
31 – 81	53.61 (10.26)	17	6	26.43 (12.36)	23

- Participants were recruited through social media, newspaper articles, community forums and snowball recruitment methods.
- Semi-structured interviews typically lasted 50 minutes and were conducted with participants either alone (n = 17) or in groups of two (n = 6).
- Participants also completed a brief demographic questionnaire.
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim (any potentially identifying information was not transcribed) and analysed using NVivo v. 11.

The aim of this study was to explore the nature of the challenges faced by the commercial fishing workforce and investigate the perceived role of workers in improving industry resilience.

## Results

- A preliminary thematic analysis of the interview transcripts has been conducted and from the data it was identified that a primary concern of commercial fishers was the **management of the commercial fishing industry**. Emerging themes about worker involvement in industry management and regulations were also identified.
- Participants reported a **desire to engage** in genuine consultation processes and some reported **actively engaging in consultation** processes currently available.
  - "...the people that sit down and make up these issues that um affect us would just give a bit more courtesy and a you know consult with us."  
- Participant 11
- However, participants also reported **barriers to engaging in consultation processes**.
- Primarily, participants perceived the **consultation processes as not being genuine**.
  - "They did consult with commercial fishermen, but, but they didn't listen to us."  
- Participant 7
  - "And we're not being listened to."  
- Focus Group 3
- Participants reported **poor communication** of consultation opportunities as a barrier to engaging in consultation processes.
  - "I mean, quite a few of the meetings that have gone on here I've been at sea for and basically, I found out about it when I get back."  
- Participant 12
- Furthermore, **commercial fishers prioritise fishing** over consultation meeting attendance.
  - "But because we're so limited like you say, we're only getting say 120 good days to actually go out deep water. And I mean, when we do these meetings, it could be one of them."  
- Participant 5

### References

1. Momtaz & Gladstone, 2008; 2. White Paper on Developing Northern Australia, 2015; 3. Jin, Kite-Powell & Talley, 2001; 4. Pollnac & Poggie, 2008; 5. Nursey-Bray, et al., 2012; 6. Shaw, Johnson & Dressler, 2011; 7. Grafton, 2010; 8. Marshall, Fenton, Marshall & Sutton, 2007; 9. Smith, Jacob, Jepson & Israel, 2003; 10. Kaplan & McCay, 2004; 11. Jagers, Berlin & Jentof, 2012; 12. Armitage, et al., 2008; 13. Sen & Nielsen, 1996; 14. Pomeroy, Katon & Harkes, 2001.

## Discussion

- The findings of this study highlight that commercial fishers have an interest in actively participating in consultation processes to improve the management of the commercial fishing industry, however barriers need to be addressed to facilitate effective management.
- Poor consultation processes can have negative impacts such as increased tensions between governing bodies and stakeholders, low morale and inefficient management processes<sup>10</sup>.
- Genuine engagement through processes such as co-management are more likely to facilitate participation in sustainability measures and adherence to regulations<sup>10, 11</sup>.
- In turn, co-management strategies are suggested to improve the resilience of management processes in complex socio-ecological systems such as commercial fishing<sup>12, 13</sup>.

## Implications for Regulation Development & Implementation

Future consultation processes should aim to provide genuine consultation with stakeholders.

Specifically, consultation with stakeholders needs to demonstrate the benefits of engaging in consultation and the impact that engagement has on the decision making process<sup>14</sup>.

Additionally, consultation opportunities need to be communicated appropriately in advance and should be flexible to meet the needs of stakeholders<sup>14</sup>.

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