

Case study 5: Encounter Marine Park social perceptions

Background

The Marine Parks Research Program is complementary to the MER Program, it aims to both build partnerships with the research community and provide an additional and external source of skills and experience to inform the management of Marine Parks. A Marine Parks research prospectus, 'Forging the Links' was released in 2013 describing marine park research priorities under three themes:

- ecological systems: status and processes
- communities: social, cultural and economic values and assets
- management effectiveness.

A key concept of the research prospectus is creating strong inter-disciplinary links between the themes, particularly the communities and ecological systems themes. Understanding the connections between people and the natural world is important for the success of all of our marine parks. Community stewardship is a central object within the South Australian *Marine Parks Act 2007*, and in 2012 the South Australian Marine Parks Council endorsed community stewardship as both a method and the goal for ensuring that South Australia's marine parks will be effective and successful.

In 2016 a social research project was commissioned to investigate the socio-cultural dimensions of determining marine park effectiveness in the Encounter Marine Park. This research is the first in South Australia to investigate the social dimension

of stewardship creation for marine parks. It provides some understanding and reasons behind whether and how community ownership is developing for the Encounter Marine Park.

This case study highlights the social research project, the links with the marine park management plan strategies, and the socio-economic outcomes as a result of implementation of the marine park management plans.

The Research

Methods

The research project "An investigation into the socio-cultural dimension of determining MPA effectiveness" was conducted by Flinders University and lead by Associate Professor Beverley Clarke. The research set out to explore perceptions of success held by communities adjacent to the Encounter Marine Park, and stakeholder groups engaged in the implementation and ongoing management of the park. It was also an aim of the study to investigate whether different groups have different perceptions about success and dimensions of success. This research involved collaborative funding from the Wildlife Conservation Fund and the DEWNR marine parks program.

Forty-one individuals and four focus groups (consisting of 32 individuals) were interviewed to gain a greater understanding of how the community 'perceive success' of the Encounter Marine Park and how they would measure it. Of the four focus groups, two consisted of participants with either commercial or recreational fishing interest, and two consisted of participants with conservation interest. The 41 individuals were interviewed between April and November 2015, and the four focus groups took place between September and October 2015.

Results

The research identified the following:

- In broad terms the Encounter Marine Park meets fundamental conditions needed for success. The park is generally perceived to already be successful and to have a range of potential, as well as already realised benefits.
- Increased tourism was the most commonly expressed socio-economic benefit perceived.



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Stewardship and community involvement in the marine park's ongoing management was of importance to respondents across the stakeholder groups. Groups indicated the need for more signage at marine parks, and more communication of marine park events, news, monitoring outcomes and education programs. It was also observed that while study participants understood potential economic benefits of the marine park, more needs to be done to promote the social benefits of the marine park.

Community support was considered to be integral to the park's success. It is expected that the existence and promotion of the marine park will lead to enhanced community understanding, and realisation of the parks ecological and social benefits. However, success of the park will be dependent upon engagement by DEWNR with the local community, which will to some extent, be dependent on ongoing resourcing for community engagement, communication, management, monitoring and enforcement.

To capture aspects of success that matter to the wider community, there is a need for indicators canvassing a wide range of parameters, however datasets for indicators of success, specific to a local marine park, may not be readily available.

Management plan strategies

Strategies addressed				
5	6	11	12	13
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Strategies 5 and 6: Through stakeholder engagement, this research helps the marine parks program understand how to cater for and promote nature based activities in marine parks to the public.

Strategies 11, 12 and 13: Outcomes from the research informed the MER Program, assisting in social research techniques and informing adaptive management.

Socio-economic outcomes

Specific evaluation questions addressed:

- ✓ Have local businesses and communities changed due to marine park management plans?
- ✓ Has coastal recreation changed due to marine park management plans?

This research will help the marine parks program to develop products and stewardship activities to assist in increasing public appreciation and understanding. This will ultimately lead to greater awareness and enjoyment of the marine park by the public, and potentially increase recreation and local tourism.

References

Clarke B., Thurstan R., Yates K. L., (2016) An investigation into the socio-cultural dimension of determining MPA effectiveness. Report prepared for Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, Adelaide.

