

Navigating Complexity: Stakeholder Perspectives on Marine Conservation and Sustainable Policies

Dang Thi Ngoc An

University of New England, Australia

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Protecting our oceans extends beyond simple environmental concerns; it is essential for sustaining life on Earth [1]. However, it is a complex task involving navigating through various intricacies and compromises. A recent study examined the intersection of marine conservation and economic-cultural interests among stakeholders, shedding light on this complexity. Using the Mindsponge theory [2] and Bayesian Mindsponge Framework (BMF) analytics [3], researchers analyzed data from 709 stakeholders across 42 countries, revealing valuable insights into stakeholders' perceptions of policies aimed at preserving marine ecosystems.

It suggests that traditional top-down approaches may not adequately address the challenges involved, as seen in the struggles with enforcing multilateral agreements [4] and managing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) [5].

For instance, despite the existence of numerous multilateral treaties, many fail due to inadequate enforcement, state non-compliance, and transnational challenges, hindering regulation enforcement across vast marine areas and leading to widespread illicit activities like overfishing and pollution [6,7].

Moreover, MPAs often employ a top-down approach, sidelining local communities' perspectives and needs, causing conflicts and resistance [5]. Limited funds, especially in developing nations, worsen the situation, hindering policy implementation and resulting in inadequate management of MPAs [8].



Illustration. Generated by Imagine AI (<https://www.imagine.art/>).

In summary, top-down approaches that overlook the perspectives and interests of local stakeholders risk lacking social acceptance and legitimacy, thereby increasing the likelihood of encountering opposition, resistance, and, ultimately, failure in achieving effective conservation outcomes [9,10].

Embracing multi-use solutions offers a promising path forward. By establishing designated spaces where economic, cultural, and environmental activities can harmoniously coexist, stakeholders can mitigate conflicts over resource utilization while ensuring equitable access for all. This approach emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts among policymakers, specialists, and stakeholders to develop comprehensive strategies that effectively balance economic, cultural, and environmental concerns [1].

However, effective marine conservation fundamentally depends on collaborating and engaging with local communities and individuals. To address this challenge, it is necessary to examine underlying cultural values to better understand the close link between human well-being and environmental health [11].

Encouraging a shift towards an “eco-surplus” mindset among stakeholders is essential for achieving long-term sustainability and safeguarding marine ecosystems. This mindset involves reframing environmental protection not as a hindrance but as a vital investment in the future. By recognizing the intrinsic value of conservation efforts, stakeholders can ensure the availability of ecosystem services crucial for human societies. Policymakers play a crucial role in this endeavor, engaging with local communities to cultivate a shared sense of environmental responsibility. Through grassroots initiatives like education and awareness campaigns, stakeholders can develop a collective commitment to marine conservation [12].

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