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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NEW ZEALAND MARINE RESERVE ADVISORY
COMMITTEES AS A PARTICIPATORY MECHANISM

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge about participatory management practices in marine protection is deficient; despite this, participatory approaches are being used with increasing frequency. In New Zealand, marine reserve advisory committees (MRCs) are a means to facilitate public involvement in marine management. The aim of this study is to determine if MRCs are an effective participatory mechanism. Four case study MRCs are examined: Kapiti, Te Whanganui-A-Hei, Long Island-Kokomohua and Te Tapuwae o Rongokako. Data collection techniques include Department of Conservation (DOC) staff interviews, a MRC member survey and document analysis.

The case study MRCs consist of eight or nine members, and include tangata whenua and interest groups. Membership is not representative of the inactive public. Comparing MRCs to theory indicates the committees are classic examples of elite advisory groups. Not all DOC staff and committee members have the same understanding of MRC roles or the benefits members receive from participation. Specific MRC roles vary, but can include advising DOC, creating public awareness initiatives and fostering community support. Absenteeism, DOC and Conservation Board support, funding, terms of reference and meeting frequency influence MRC effectiveness. The majority of DOC interviewees and MRC survey respondents are satisfied with the current system; however, MRC respondents desire more funding and resources. Only one case study MRC has a strong majority of respondents who want to augment their responsibilities and decision-making power. To increase the ability of MRCs to act, a framework of different levels of advisory committees is suggested. Means to improve the current MRC system include: networking between marine reserves; clarifying terminology used (e.g. participation and partnership); greater use of perceptual and traditional knowledge; a transparent process; tangible results; and providing MRC members with incentives and clear feedback. Building on other research, this thesis enhances the understanding of interactions between MRCs and DOC, and provides guidance that may be useful to build on current efforts to engage the local community in marine conservation. Though specific to New Zealand, the results are useful to planners and managers in other nations because effective participation and community support are key to the success of protected areas.

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The calm waters continue on the eastern side of Long Island.

*The day's muggy silence and clarity of the reflections
are broken only by our paddle strokes and the kayaks gliding through the water.*

*From the silence comes whales; our ears focus on their breathing
and our eyes follow their movements.*

*More graceful than our aspirations;
glistening backs and dorsal fins rise and descend through the waters around us.*

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