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What Works Best When: the Role of  
Collaboration in Environmental Policy and  
Planning

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## **Abstract**

Conflicting views about the use of natural resources create challenges for environmental management. Scholarly theory suggests that there are different types of policy problem, and these can be identified within a framework that considers the degree of certainty over relevant knowledge, and the degree of consensus on norms and values. By determining and understanding the nature of a policy problem, planning practitioners can choose a problem-solving strategy that is appropriate for different policy problem types. In New Zealand, one policy strategy, collaboration, is increasingly being promoted to resolve conflicts, as collaboration is seen as having more effective outcomes than existing adversarial planning processes. The aim of this research is to explore how collaboration can offer better outcomes for stakeholders involved in environmental resource conflicts, compared to conventional planning processes.

This study used Q methodology to examine and explore the scope for collaboration to address a policy problem that arose in New Zealand in 2012, namely how to reconcile the divergent views about the expansion of finfish farm development in the Marlborough Sounds. The study showed that there was a high degree of uncertainty over relevant knowledge and a lack of consensus on norms and values between stakeholders, indicating that finfish farm development in the Marlborough Sounds is an unstructured, or 'wicked' problem. The policy strategy best suited to solving this type of problem is a collaborative process that involves learning because it enables participants to identify, confront and integrate divergent viewpoints and knowledge. In doing this, participants reframe the policy problem and discover new opportunities for solving it.

In this study, the greatest degree of diversity between viewpoints on finfish farm development was between industry stakeholders and others (iwi, non-

government organisations, community members and governance and regulation representatives). The study highlights the need for the finfish farming industry to improve public understanding and gain support for its activities in order to achieve its growth and development goals. It also shows that, depending on the nature of the policy problems being addressed, collaborative planning processes could be adopted to manage conflicts about environmental resource use in settings other than freshwater in New Zealand.

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## Abbreviations

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BOI	Board of Inquiry
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
EDS	Environmental Defence Society
ha	Hectare
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
LGA	Local Government Act 2002
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
MDC	Marlborough District Council
MfE	Ministry for the Environment
MPI	Ministry for Primary Industries
MSRMP	Marlborough Sounds Resource Management Plan
NPS	National Policy Statement
NZKS	New Zealand King Salmon Company Limited
ROI	Registration of Interest
RMA	Resource Management Act 1991
RfP	Request for Proposal
s	Section (of an Act)
SOS	Save our Sounds

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