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Further reading:

Fitzpatrick, M., Maravelias, C., Eigaard, O., Hynes, S., and Reid, D. (2017) Fisher's preferences and trade-offs between management options. Fish and Fisheries, DOI: 10.1111/faf.12204

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No panaceas in sea fisheries management

This research involved an evaluation of fisher's preferences for various management measures proposed under the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform process, but the conclusions have wider relevance as similar measures are used by comparable fleets in fisheries globally. The choice experiment survey was conducted with fishers involved in mixed pelagic and demersal fisheries in Ireland, pelagic fisheries in Denmark and demersal fisheries in Greece.

Research Findings

The research used a random utility modelling framework to reveal the preferences of the fishers across the alternative policy attributes. Results indicated that while there were generally preferences both for healthy stocks and for maintaining the importance of fishing to the local community, strong inter-fishery preference differences did exist. These differences were most notable in relation to a discard ban and to the use of individual transferable fishing rights, favoured in Denmark, but not in Ireland for instance. The strength of these inter-fishery differences supports the assertion that there are no 'one size fits all' options in fisheries management and that solutions should be tailored within the context of each specific fisheries. Not doing so could create a risk of inappropriately managed fisheries that may lead to unsustainable outcomes. The three fisheries also clearly showed different priorities in the ranking of high level management objectives, with the Irish favouring support for the local community, the Danish emphasising profits, and the Greeks emphasising ecosystem productivity. The authors note that this did not necessarily reflect national differences but may be due to the different nature of each of the fisheries examined, ranging from industrialised pelagic fishing in Denmark to quite small scale demersal fisheries in Greece, with Ireland somewhere in between. There were also some important similarities, most significantly in terms of prioritising community wellbeing and concerns over the implementation of the CFP landing obligation.

Policy Implications

Failure to understand the potential responses of fishers to management measures creates a risk of revisiting the familiar scenario of perverse and unintended consequences of those measures. The main implication of this research can be found in the significant heterogeneity of the preferences within and across the three different fisheries examined. This heterogeneity highlights the need for decision-making processes on management measures with significant social and economic impacts to be inclusive of a broad range of fishers. The results also suggest, based on preference heterogeneity, that there could be a differentiated approach in management for larger and smaller vessels. This is an important consideration given that many fishing fleets are still dominated in numbers by small vessels while high level representation and political influence arguably favour larger vessels.