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Managing the NSW coastal zone: Restructuring governance for inclusive development

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ABSTRACT

In 2013 the New South Wales (NSW) Government (Australia) established the NSW Marine Estate Management Authority (the Authority) to improve community engagement in coastal zone management. The outcome has been the coordination of activities and efforts of state government departments to maximize the social, economic and environmental values of the Marine Estate. While much has been written in regard to Integrated Coastal (Zone) Management (IC(Z)M) planning, papers that discuss its actual implementation are far fewer. This paper discusses how, given the minimal guiding literature in this area, the processes of IC(Z)M planning and implementation are being approached in NSW and its success to date. It is not a discussion of research undertaken, but a review and analysis of IC(Z)M in action, contextualized by a number of development approaches and theories that may help explain its emerging success in integrating government agency planning and activities.

With reference to inclusive development and interactive governance theories, this paper discusses the principles and the five steps of the process adopted by the Authority. It reviews the challenges and achievements in developing appropriate and comprehensive consultation; threat and risk assessment procedures; and implementation and review processes. It concludes that the theory of inclusive development and interactive governance are well-founded and worthy aspirations in the IC(Z)M context. However, it also identifies that traditional governance frameworks of developed nation states, such as Australia, challenge the immediate and short term reality of achieving IC(Z)M. It identifies the key to success of IC(Z)M is the meta governance, expressed through the organizational culture of not only departments but their political masters, which need to be open, adaptive and flexible, and that this requires considerable focus as it remains an ongoing challenge.

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1. Introduction

There is an extensive body of literature discussing the background to the development of Integrated Coastal (Zone) Management (IC(Z)M), however it is largely focussed on technocratic and procedural processes that tend to ignore the governing politics. As identified by Glavovic (2016), IC(Z)M is an “inherently political process that seeks to reconcile inherent tensions (e.g. between geographic scales; short and longer-term interest; stability and flexibility; and collaboration and conflict) and take into account the centrality of power relationships and imbalances in coastal

governance”. Theories such as inclusive development (Gupta et al., 2015) and interactive governance (Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009) which this paper draws upon, shed light on alternative methods to the process and challenges of implementation, and which have been used to varying degrees in the case study discussed here. The paper also draws upon the theory of PDIA (Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation) as developed by Andrews et al. (2013) which, while proposed to be applicable to challenges of governance of issues in developing nations, is discussed here in terms of its offer in resolving governance challenges of IC(Z)M for developed states, and how it has – albeit not explicitly – been used in NSW in the development of modified processes to aid departmental collaboration. This paper, contributes to this Special Issue on Inclusive Development and Coastal Management by examining the extent to

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which experiences in implementation in NSW with coastal zone management, shed light on the challenges for implementing inclusive development utilising interactive governance theories.

The problem of managing increasingly densely populated coastal zones and regions is not new. NSW is attempting to break new ground in Australia with the creation of a multi-agency, overarching Marine Estate Management Authority (MEMA), aiming to improve inter-agency coordination to deliver an integrated 10-year marine estate management strategy. Previously, management of the estate has been managed via a 'silo' approach across four different government departments and associated agencies, with varying areas of focus, from transport, to economic productivity (fishing, aquaculture), to tourism, to preservation of the environment and heritage, with the divergent priorities that those different foci entail. The move to an integrated whole of marine estate management plan that connects and integrates these activities is an innovation for Australia in the shift from an environmental and often conservation-based focus on managing biodiversity in the marine estate¹ (via marine protected areas – MPAs – through a variety of mechanisms including marine parks (6), aquatic reserves (12), and national parks and nature reserves (62)). See Fig. 1 to one which seeks to optimise the social, economic and environmental values and benefits (termed 'community wellbeing') derived from environmentally sustainable uses of the resource, across the entire coastal zone.

The endeavour is to manage the whole of the 'marine estate' (the estuaries, coastline and State marine waters) as one continuous unit, in a fair and equitable manner, recognising and responding to sustainability concerns. However, while NSW is fundamentally using an IC(Z)M approach, several factors differentiate this effort from previous Australian attempts. The factors are; the establishment of an overarching body to facilitate coordination between agencies and, more significantly, the explicit acknowledgement that planning should be cognizant of the social values, as well as economic and environmental values of affected communities. The first element recognises the issues raised by interactive governance theory while the second reflects the aspirations of inclusive development theory. However, in order to achieve the organizational environment that facilitates interactive governance – a facilitator of inclusive development – the NSW process has identified a gap in both agency knowledge and practice to be open, flexible and adaptive, which this paper posits, the theory of PDIA provides a tested means to address.

2. Integrated coastal zone management: a background

The concept of IC(Z)M has been around for some fifty years, since the late 1960s (Clark, 1992; Fletcher and Potts, 2008; Misdorp, 2011; Sorensen, 1997; Vallega, 1999). Consequently, while it is not new, IC(Z)M is fundamentally different from the methods of marine or land planning that are most commonly employed as it aspires to be inclusive and consultative and most importantly to manage on a triple bottom line basis, rather than on an environmental or economic basis alone. Significantly, such management is far more challenging, in its consideration of all components – ecological, social and economic – and technically, without significant trade-offs between achieving the objectives of each. However, due to political and economic pressures, trade-offs are often made in favour of

economic goals. In the case of Australia examples of such trade-offs would include channel deepening for shipping despite expressed environmental concerns (both Port Phillip Bay Victoria, and Gladstone Harbour Queensland); trade and transport despite the risk of oil and fuel spills from shipping, (Newcastle NSW); or coastal development (clearing of mangroves) despite environmental effects (benthic, ecosystem and fish stock impacts); social effects on visual amenity, and cultural ones on Aboriginal use of coastal zones.

ICM or IC(Z)M, are the two commonly used terms to describe both applied and academic discussions of coastal management and planning processes (Fletcher and Potts, 2008) where ambitions exist to coordinate and integrate the activities of stakeholders who are significantly affected by, or affect the quantity and or quality of, coastal resources and environments. This is identified as being necessary to coordinate across industry, affected community and NGO sectors (horizontally) and levels of government (vertically) (Sorensen, 1997). IC(Z)M formalised the concept of coastal cooperation and theoretically promotes a structured application of a system to simultaneously manage these cross cutting activities and agencies, that results in "transparent governance and stakeholder involvement" (Misdorp, 2011).

The concept of IC(Z)M only became embedded in the language of marine managers and academics, seemingly since Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) engaged with the concept in the early 1990s. In 1992, the FAO outlined the fifteen principles of ICM (Clark, 1992), which covered all three elements of social, ecological and economic. These principles of IC(Z)M have since been broadly discussed and attempts have been made to implement them by states around the world that have marine boundaries (Sorensen, 1993, 1997). Gupta et al. (2015) posit that the achievement of sustainability is based in a focus on the environment through the lens of social inclusiveness, rather than economic growth. This is based on the most vulnerable of society often being those also most dependent on environmental assets and ecosystem services, and likely to be subject to the negative impacts of local and global changes. These authors (2015) make a case for the ability to strengthen the effectiveness and robustness of IC(Z)M by utilising this 'inclusive development' approach to ameliorate excessive foci on growth and employment which, they claim, has resulted in equity, social inclusivity and environmental elements and opportunities being 'traded-off'. It is undeniable that the issue of trade-offs between economic, social and cultural lifestyle priorities is a key feature, often seen as a stumbling block, in negotiating the priorities of different stakeholders involved in coastal zone management. However, economic outcomes, the benefits of which are often inequitably distributed, are no longer regarded as the only and/or adequate objective of integrated coastal management planning. To this end, NSW has adopted – albeit implicitly – an inclusive development approach in its endeavour to create an integrated marine estate management plan, discussed in detail in Section Three.

Subsequent to the FAO report, the 1993 World Coast Conference in the Netherlands recognised IC(Z)M as the most appropriate concept by which to address current and long term coastal management issues. Building on the idea of inclusive development, it recognised that implementation will, by necessity, consist of both strategic (vision) and operational (tasks) activities in the areas of: problem recognition; coastal system knowledge; public consultations; and education and awareness programs (Misdorp, 2011). Significantly in the four elements outlined by Misdorp, who infers governance (or central management) should be approached only to facilitate partnerships in the process – indicating non interactive involvement of institutions. Conceptually, and in an ideal world, this may be the optimum situation where partners and stakeholders work together, incentivised only by the imperative to

¹ The 'marine estate' is defined as extending from the coast three nautical miles seaward, and includes estuaries, coastal wetlands, beaches, dunes and headlands along with lakes and lagoons.

² http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/633582/NSW-marine-protected-area-map.pdf (Accessed Sept. 25, 2016).

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