

# SHORING UP MSP: A Briefing Note on the Role for Municipal Governments in Marine Spatial Planning in Nova Scotia

## KEY POINTS

- The land-sea connection is very important, yet the ocean and the land are often separated in planning. MSP can promote conversations among different jurisdictions, which are crucial for the success of MSP.
- Substantial municipal involvement in MSP is important; however, there is skepticism among local government personnel about provincial and federal governments' understanding of municipal planning and what municipalities could offer to the process.
- Municipal interests about coastal communities are directly related to the marine space, yet municipal governments have limited knowledge about MSP.
- Municipalities can contribute to MSP processes in a way that is difficult to obtain from other sources (e.g., connectivity is stronger when a municipality conducts consultation as opposed to upper levels of government).

## BACKGROUND

**Marine Spatial Planning** (MSP) is a public process that helps stakeholders decide how to share and sustainably use ocean spaces. People from different sectors come together to find a balance among environmental, economic, and social uses of coastal and marine areas. The federal government has committed to an MSP program that will include the Atlantic region and Nova Scotia's coastal and ocean waters by 2024.

## ARE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS READY TO TAKE ON A ROLE IN MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING?

Coastal communities occupy the **land-sea interface** and their residents' livelihood and identity often stem from the ocean. Furthermore, local governments control and manage **land use**, which is a factor in coastal and marine planning. They are now also managing the impacts of **climate change**, such as coastal flooding from sea level rise. Coastal communities will be impacted by decisions about marine management, but there is no clearly articulated involvement for coastal municipalities in the MSP process.

This research project sought opinions about municipal involvement in MSP from 23 participants in local, provincial, and federal government departments and non-governmental organizations. While the views about the purpose and processes of MSP varied among the participants, there was

agreement about the **need to obtain input from all levels of government**. The results also suggested that municipal governments have limited knowledge about MSP and a weak understanding of what role they can play, as well as skepticism about what upper levels of government, especially federal agencies, understand about municipalities' role in planning and what they could offer to the process.

## MUNICIPALITIES IN MSP

- Each municipality should play a role that informs decisions that will affect them. Municipalities are **not all the same** and it is not enough to consider municipal issues abstractly.
- MSP can provide an opportunity for municipalities to be involved in marine decision making, despite their **lack of jurisdiction**.
- Smaller communities may not have the time and/or **capacity** to engage, while larger municipalities are disproportionately able to actively participate.
- **Municipalities** can contribute planning experience, including managing the landward side of the coastal zone. They can provide local knowledge and context, collect data, conduct local engagement, and educate their constituents. They also control land-based marine impacts (e.g., pollution and sedimentation) through land use controls and they are responsible for managing the land-use infrastructure needs of the marine industry.
- It is the role of **provincial governments** to act as a liaison between the federal and municipal governments for MSP. They must facilitate and coordinate interactions between the different jurisdictions and bring municipalities to the table.
- **The federal government** can help by providing funding, workshops and seminars about the process, having clear expectations of what is required of municipalities, and being transparent.

## NEXT STEPS

1. Municipalities need to be aware that MSP is occurring, that it has implications for them, and that they have an important role to play in the process.
2. There should be clear indication of the role municipalities will play in MSP. This is necessary to allow them to prepare and set realistic expectations.
3. The federal government should provide resources to municipalities to support their participation in MSP, especially for those with limited capacity.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

If the purpose of MSP is to facilitate better, environmentally sustainable, marine management while promoting a blue economy, coastal communities should be a primary beneficiary of a plan. The ocean and the land are not separate – coastal communities operate in the transition zone – yet, as many interviewees of this research pointed out, land and sea are often separated in planning. More opportunity for local governments in Nova Scotia to participate in marine sector decision-making will lead to better marine plans with local relevance and connections across planning systems.



Image Credit: Monica DeVidi