

Where are local communities in Marine Spatial Planning?



How can local communities benefit from and be involved in marine spatial planning (MSP) was the top-of-mind question at a one-day workshop at Dalhousie University in Halifax on Thursday, 22 February 2024. Over 70 participants including representatives of non-governmental organizations, Mi'kmaw organizations, industry, academia, and government, and interested members of the public spent the day immersed in presentations, a panel session, and breakout discussion groups. They considered this important, but often under-appreciated, subject in many of the marine spatial planning initiatives around the world (Manuel & MacDonald, 2020).

The implementation of marine spatial planning often falls short of its theoretical ideals, particularly regarding stakeholder inclusion (Clarke & Flannery, 2020; Jones et al., 2016). While MSP theory emphasizes stakeholder engagement as being fundamental (Frazão Santos et al., 2014), in practice, top-down approaches typically dominate, favoring national and international interests over local community groups and citizens (Flannery et al., 2018). Consequently, many local stakeholders are marginalized as they lack the capacity to influence decisions that directly affect their interests (McAteer et al., 2022).

Organized by the Marine Spatial Planning research group co-lead by Dr. Patricia Manuel (School of Planning) and Dr. Bertrum MacDonald (Department of Information Science) at Dalhousie University, this workshop was designed to promote greater awareness and understanding of why and how coastal communities could be more effectively involved in marine spatial planning. The MSP research group works within the [Social Licence & Planning in Coastal Communities](#)

research project of the [Ocean Frontier Institute](#) at Dalhousie University, which funded the day-long event.

The workshop began with a land acknowledgment followed by opening remarks by Dr. [Jean-François Bousquet](#), Associate Scientific Director of the Transforming Climate Action Program of the Ocean Frontier Institute. Then, the first session featured three presentations that provided an overview of the implementation and research about MSP in Atlantic Canada. Jason Naug and Elisabeth Nagel (Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)), outlined [DFO's MSP initiatives](#) in the Scotian Shelf and Bay of Fundy bioregion. Patricia Manuel (School of Planning) and Daniel Martinez Calderon (Doctoral student) spoke about research conducted by the [Dalhousie MSP research group](#), and Glen Smith ([OFI Visiting Scholar](#) and Lecturer at Wageningen University) described his research in Nova Scotia and England about land and sea interconnections.



In the second session, five speakers presented perspectives of several sectors that have direct connections to marine spatial planning: [Jenny Weitzman](#) (Research Scientist, Centre for Marine Applied Research) spoke about aquaculture and marine spatial planning; [Maxine Westhead](#) (Director of the Dalhousie University Marine Affairs Program) noted how marine conservation must be viewed as an important factor in ocean planning; [Gerald Sheehan](#) (Project Development Manager, SBM Offshore) spoke about marine renewable energy, particularly the spatial requirements of capturing wind energy; [Dave Adler](#) (Owner and President of East Coast Outfitters) described spatial requirements for marine recreation from his perspective of a company offering kayaking experience along Nova Scotia's coasts; and the panel concluded with [Darren Porter](#) (Commercial Harvester; Owner and President, Minas Select Inc.) who commented on the place of fisheries in coastal waters and communities in the province.

The third session focused on local community-based examples and interests. [Rebecca Brushett](#) (Marine Protection and Planning Coordinator with the Ecology Action Centre) described the experience of a bottom-up planning initiative in a presentation she titled "People, place, and the ocean: Mapping significant areas for a prosperous community and healthy ocean around the Gros Morne Region of western Newfoundland and Labrador." The second presenter, [Kelsey White](#) (Program Manager in Aquatic Resources and Fisheries Management - Marine Conservation and

Engagement Specialist, Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq) provided the important perspective of Indigenous communities regarding marine spatial planning.

With the various presentations as grounding in the subject, five groups of the attendees, facilitated by Dalhousie undergraduate and graduate students, considered two broad questions in two breakout sessions, namely, How can MSP support coastal communities and interests? and How can coastal communities and interests contribute to MSP? Wide ranging discussion in these groups identified numerous important points that were reported at the conclusion of the breakout sessions. For example, the participants noted that marine spatial planning can restore and strengthen connections to marine spaces by encouraging communities to focus on their cultural, linguistic, and heritage ties to the coasts and ocean. They emphasized that integrating community input and engaging with coastal communities is complicated and will vary in every marine spatial plan. Bringing communities into planning processes, and truly obtaining their collaboration, will require patience, adaptiveness, open-mindedness, and transparency. Transparency will help people to commit to the implementation of a plan to which they shared their knowledge and experiences. Thus, adaptive, bottom-up approaches will be needed to engage communities, as no single method of involving communities will be sufficient.



The workshop wrapped up with observations by [Joanna Smith](#) (Director of Ocean Planning and Mapping and Global MSP Lead for The Nature Conservancy (Nature United, Canada)), who served as the rapporteur. She emphasized that to be successful marine spatial planning is a process as well as a product that requires extensive engagement of coastal communities and the various stakeholders. She drew attention to several key themes including the importance of using multiple knowledge sources and relationships (local, fisheries, Indigenous, academic) and engaging the youth in the region who are the future beneficiaries of planning initiatives.



A report about the workshop is being prepared by the OFI Marine Spatial Planning research group, which will cover the informative presentations and breadth of the discussion. The report will be available later this spring.

This workshop was co-sponsored by the Dalhousie University Department of Information Science, the Marine Affairs Program, and the School of Planning, and the Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

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