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Integrated management councils A conceptual model for ocean policy conflict management in Australia

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Abstract

Integrated management is a central theme of *Australia's Oceans Policy (AOP)*. Improving integration across sectors and jurisdictions has been identified in a number of Australian initiatives in coastal and marine policy developed in the past decade. These initiatives include the Regional Marine Planning process under AOP undertaken in 2000–02 and commitments to a National Coastal Policy made in 2002. These initiatives have highlighted the need for institutional arrangements that address these two key dimensions of integration in the Australian marine environment. This paper reviews Australian initiatives in ocean and coastal policy and draws on lessons from Canadian experience to propose Integrated Management Councils as a 'way forward' for integrated and adaptive management focusing on the decentralization of power and community participation in the decision-making process.

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1. Introduction

The release of *Australia's Oceans Policy (AOP)* [1], by the then Minister for the Environment, Senator Robert Hill on 23 December 1998 followed a number of coastal and ocean management initiatives introduced in the preceding decade (see [2,3]). This policy was released a week before the conclusion of the International Year of the Ocean, making 'Australia the first country in the world to develop a comprehensive, national plan to protect and manage the oceans' [4]. While AOP is

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part of a continuum in policy development, it attempts a significant departure from traditional sectoral management arrangements by focusing on integrated management across sectors and jurisdictions. The policy also confronts problems and limitations that have been identified in current practices and includes over 400 initiatives for Commonwealth government agencies [5]. In focusing on ‘integration between sectors and jurisdictions’, the policy development confronted longstanding tensions between Commonwealth and State governments (and between and among resource users) over coastal and marine management. A gradual easing of these tensions that had occurred during the development of AOP ceased when consultation between the Commonwealth and the States ceased in the 6 months prior to the release of AOP. This has meant that, despite on-going negotiations, no states have formally endorsed the Oceans Policy, thus limiting its formal reach to Commonwealth waters and agencies.

Despite the problems in gaining intergovernmental agreement, increased attention to Australia’s coastal and marine areas has been spurred by increasing public concern at visible degradation of what, for many, are iconic elements of the Australian landscape. While the ‘bush’ or ‘outback’ has been portrayed as the ‘real’ Australia, the reality is that 80 percent of Australians live within 80 km of the coast, with a concomitant level of economic and social infrastructure in the coastal zone. A commitment by the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment Dr. David Kemp to a National Coastal Policy [6] reinforces Commonwealth interest in this policy area but also highlights challenges to implementing integrated ocean and coastal management. The Government has promised a National Coastal Policy that will “conserve and restore coastal and estuarine biodiversity, encourage ecologically sustainable use of coastal and estuarine resources and bring about much needed coordination and planning for the coastal zone” [6].

The challenges in implementing integrated ocean and coastal policy in Australia form a backdrop to the material presented in this paper. The paper first provides a survey of Australia’s oceans governance framework and policy development in relation to coastal zone and oceans policy. After addressing issues associated with the implementation of AOP the paper then introduces the concept of ‘integrated management councils’ as a mechanism to counter existing problems and current difficulties in operationalizing commitments to ‘integration between sectors and jurisdictions’. Following an examination of experiences in Canada the paper concludes with an assessment of the potential of, and constraints on, ‘integrated management councils’ in development of ocean and coastal governance.

2. Australia’s oceans governance arrangements

Utilization of Australia’s marine resources and coastal areas extends back tens of thousands of years. Indigenous peoples around the Australian coastline harvested fin-fish, shellfish and crustaceans and with recognized arrangements governing use of these resources [7]. Dependence on fisheries increased with European settlement, and as pressure on fish stocks increased so too did early attempts to regulate use. This

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