

Systems in action: Modelling a muddle

Part 3

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GINA LANDOR: The North Sea. Where the fish are actually caught, and have been, more or less unhindered for hundreds of years. The next task in the management of the fishery is to actually intervene. Having come to a scientific decision about the types and sizes of fish that should be removed from the sea, how do you implement that decision in the fishing system?

COLIN BANNISTER: Well, the process of making fisheries management decisions and instituting them is actually quite a complicated one involving several steps. The first step is as you've just said, the scientific one of assessing the stocks and making the scientific recommendations. It's important to point out that that is actually coordinated by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, a body which coordinates the activities of the scientists of many fishing nations, including European member states, Scandinavian and Nordic countries, Russia and North America.

Usually, once a year the scientists take their own data to working groups set up by I.C.E.S., with responsibilities for particular species and particular areas. The scientists then pool the data, analyse the recent stock trends, use the sorts of models that we've been looking at to decide on the long-term objectives, and then calculate the short step to next year's total allowable catch.

GINA LANDOR: The next stage, Brussels. Scientific and technical committees of the European community look at the values for the Total Allowable Catch or TAC produced by the scientists. These EC civil servants have a coordinating function, but also must be mindful of the conservation policy of the community, which is intended to decrease fishing effort in the short term, in order to increase effort in the long term.

They formulate their own proposals, which are handed on through easy channels to the third stage: consideration by the Council of Ministers.

COLIN BANNISTER: It's at this stage that the various fishing interests become aware of what the proposals are likely to be for next year. And it's there that quite a tough debate can ensue. If we look at it from the minister's point of view, they have a very difficult job. On the one hand, they've got their scientific advice, the stock conservation responsibilities. And on the other hand, they have the strong interests of their own fishing communities.

And there's quite a lot of lobbying goes on because obviously, in the current day and age, a lot of the scientific recommendations are restrictive, trying to cut back on fishing opportunities whereas the fishing industries of the member states and obviously trying to limit the restrictions on their activity. And ministers will try and make the best deal that they can with regard both to the scientific realities and also the interests of their own industries.

SEA CAPTAIN: Looks like LT340, sir.

GINA LANDOR: These decisions on fishing effort, minimum fish size, and net mesh size become law. Fisheries protection vessels can board any trawler that is fishing in EC waters to ensure that no breaches have occurred. The skipper or vessel owner can be prosecuted if illegalities are discovered.

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