

Stakeholder engagement in the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES)

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Abstract

Stakeholder engagement has become pivotal in research and policy processes in the marine realm worldwide. However, participation is still a multilayered puzzle of credibility, legitimacy and saliency. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) mission is to advance and share scientific understanding of marine ecosystems and services and to use this knowledge to generate state-of-the-art advice for meeting conservation, management, and sustainability goals. ICES represents 20 contracting parties from the North Atlantic, Baltic Sea and Arctic and engages, on an annual basis, nearly 2000 researchers.

ICES could be considered representative of other major global organizations, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES): knowledge-intensive organizations with an advisory role, using information with high levels of uncertainty and receiving demands for stakeholder engagement.

ICES has generated knowledge and advice for more than 100 years, although opening and reflecting on how to dialogue and interact with stakeholders started to be explored only 30 years ago. Our research combines literature review, participatory observation, theory of participation and institutional analysis to develop a typology for managing participation at the science-policy interface.

Typologies of participation conventionally focus on three main variables: the who, the how, and the what for. More comprehensive approaches combine agency (top-down and bottom-up) and participation mode (from communication to consultation and co-production). Our typology explicitly acknowledges that power dynamics are inherent to any participatory process. Innovation relies on the multiple roles stakeholders may play within an organization and the fact that the same stakeholder could assume a different role depending on the process. We will present the theoretical development and implementation through the ICES Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (2023) and how it supports our capability to design participatory processes in light of organizational and societal goals.