

The Communication of Information in Multi-Sectoral Networks: A Case Study of Tidal Power Network(s) in the Bay of Fundy Region of Atlantic Canada

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Abstract

Natural resource developments, particularly those taking place in highly active, and often hotly contested, coastal areas involve a complex interplay among multiple stakeholders, sometimes with competing interests. In the Bay of Fundy region, a form of renewable energy that harnesses kinetic energy generated by tidal forces, known colloquially as “tidal power,” is being explored. Tidal turbine implementation affects multiple stakeholders, e.g., municipal, provincial, and federal government agencies; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); environmental groups; industry both domestic and foreign; universities; and community groups, including First Nations communities. The literature suggests that the development of strong communication and information-sharing networks is essential to the success of such endeavors. Using a mixed-methods approach involving participant-led mapping of communication channels, semi-structured interviews, and Social Network Analysis (SNA), this research examines with whom and to what extent stakeholder organizations are communicating information about tidal power in the Bay of Fundy region.

The findings indicate that the tidal power communication network is comprised primarily of the government, industry, First Nations, NGO, and research sectors. Cross-sectoral communication is occurring, but some sectors, e.g., fishing and aquaculture and First Nations, are not well connected. Information is being shared strategically in the network to alleviate uncertainty and fill knowledge gaps in a nascent field that has many unknowns. Strategic communication is also used as a means to garner social license through stakeholder engagement and public education/awareness building about tidal power activities. The respondents highlighted a number of factors that act as either enablers or barriers to communication. Bridger organizations, predominantly from the NGO, government, and research sectors, were identified as instrumental to cross-sectoral communication. Committees, sub-committees, and working groups, as well as conferences and workshops, were emphasized as key communication mechanisms. Regulatory committees were also shown to be effective means for breaking down departmental silos in government, and ameliorating both internal and external channels of

communication. Based on the results, several recommendations are outlined as a means of strengthening communication networks in the region.