

The Primacy of Grey: Studies of Publications of Marine Governmental Groups

D.M. Cossarini, S.S. Soomai, B.H. MacDonald, & P.G. Wells

Dalhousie University Information Management, Resource and Environmental Studies, Marine Affairs Program, and International Ocean Institute, Halifax, Canada

Abstract

Our research addresses fundamental questions about the use and influence of scientific information produced by marine environmental governmental groups. Such non-commercial publications are described as grey literature. Results from interviews and surveys of key informants in public sector management are enhancing our understanding of the production, diffusion, and use of such information.

Results from two case studies are presented:

GOMC (Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment)

FAO (UN-Food and Agriculture Organization) and **CRFM** (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism)

Introduction

- Primary literature is not the only means of communicating scientific information. Grey literature is important to the overall knowledge base.
- Numerous scientific studies, published as grey literature, inform timely and effective policy-making when warranted.
- The legitimacy of grey literature has recently become controversial, e.g., IPCC, 2007.
- A better understanding of information production, distribution, and use enables an evaluation of influence.

Guiding Questions

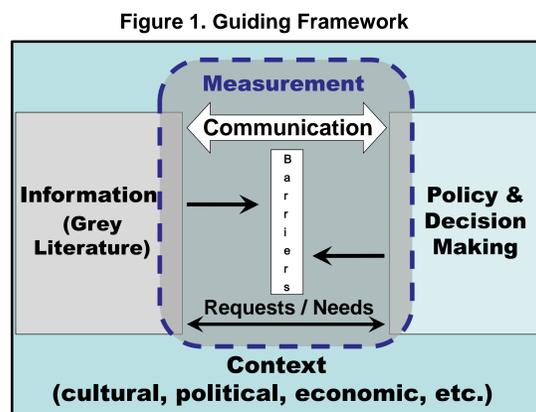
What have the two organizations published, where, and how?

What are the information pathways in intergovernmental and governmental organizations?

What is the evidence of distribution and use of these publications?

How can marine environmental information in grey formats be more influential in decision making?

Our research is guided by the framework shown in Figure 1:



Methods

Our methods have included:

- Identification of publications and analysis of citations to them.
- Content analysis of publications for characteristics promoting distribution and awareness.
- Surveys of stakeholders in a Caribbean fishery to determine information pathways.
- Interviews with informed insiders within GOMC's primary Working Group.

Results

Figure 2. Representative Sample Response from Interviews and Surveys

	Production	Distribution	Use
Case #1: GOMC (Figure 3)	<p>Fragmented Process</p> <p><i>there's a review process that currently is hard to figure out...it's a very erratic process at the moment</i></p> <p>Member Q</p>	<p>Highly personalized methods</p> <p><i>...there are times when we don't necessarily distribute a physical report but we're constantly brokering the information that's inside that report</i></p> <p>Member G</p>	<p>Evidence of use, but not influence</p> <p><i>...we have that handout on American Eel... I gave that to our pelagics advisor... he found it very informative...he never told me how [he] recommended to the minister what our position is...</i></p> <p>Member K</p>
Case #2: FAO/CRFM (Figure 4)	<p>Baseline information</p> <p><i>Publications of FAO or CRFM shrimp and groundfish Working Groups are perhaps the most comprehensive reports of the resources in this region</i></p> <p>Fisheries Manager, FM4</p>	<p>No formalized methods</p> <p><i>...scientists may decide to convene a meeting of industry stakeholders..... if industry was in any way associated There was a mechanism to inform agency personnel...but this cannot seem to maintain its momentum.</i></p> <p>Fisheries manager, FM3</p>	<p>Limited evidence of use</p> <p><i>There is need for technical documents but it is also important to produce summaries of the findings in a manner that would appeal to fisherfolk and primary stakeholders</i></p> <p>Fisheries manager, FM2</p>

Figure 3: Guiding Framework for GOMC Study

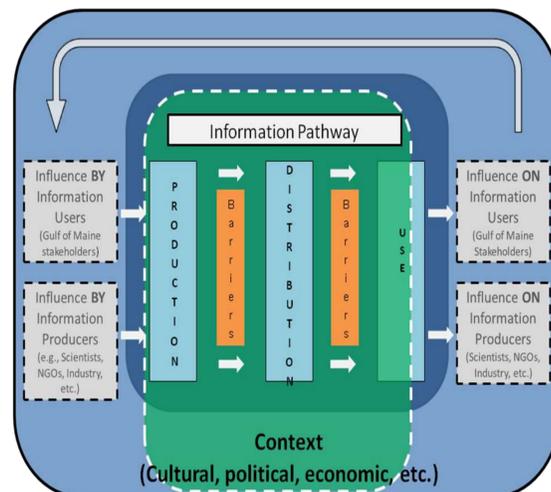
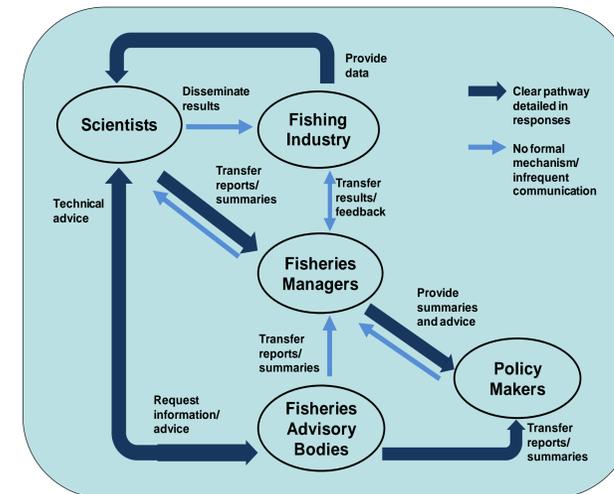


Figure 4: Information flow demonstrated for FAO/CRFM



Significance of Findings

- Stakeholders were concerned with scientific information as a whole and the type of literature was not considered to be relevant.
- There are barriers to communication, but also opportunities for enhancing information flow.

Next Steps

Grey literature is here to stay and has expanded in scope and importance due to the emergence of digital and open access sources of information.

Our future research includes:

- Continuing citation analysis.
- Developing methods for evaluating the influence of such literature on decision making in environmental fields.
- Expanding our case studies to include:
 - Environment Canada
 - Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture
 - Additional UN bodies
- Partnering with other environmental research agencies to increase the diversity and interdisciplinary nature of the project.

Recent Presentations & Publications

B.H. MacDonald, R.E. Cordes, & P.G. Wells. (2007). Assessing the diffusion and impact of grey literature published by international intergovernmental scientific groups: The case of the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 14.5

IPCC. (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). 2007. Climate Change 2007. The Fourth Assessment Report (AR4). Four Volumes. United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. UNFCCC, WMO and UNEP, United Nations, New York, NY.

Soomai, S.S. (2009). *Information and influence in fisheries management: A preliminary study of the shrimp and groundfish resources in the Brazil-Guianas continental shelf*. (Master's project). Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Contacts

Bertrum MacDonald 902-494-2472
bertrum.macdonald@dal.ca
Peter Wells 902-237-0600
oceans2@ns.sympatico.ca