



THE OCEANOGRAPHY SOCIETY

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Oceanography Society was founded in 1988 to disseminate knowledge of oceanography and to facilitate communication through research and education, to promote communication among oceanographers, and to provide a constituency for consensus-building across all the disciplines of the field.

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Our Tent is Getting Fuller, But It's Not Crowded Yet

SEVERAL ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE of *Oceanography* illustrate the need for our community to devise mechanisms for translating the results of scientific research into sound public policy. Traditionally, our goal—perhaps somewhat naïvely—has been to provide scientific research results directly to policymakers to influence legislation, regulations, or executive actions. Scientists are comfortable with updating hypotheses as new data are gathered and colleagues have a chance to review them. That route seems reasonable where the latest research indicates that the scientific basis of an existing policy was flawed. For example, new data presented by Greene et al. in this issue suggest that fishing quotas set on one side of the Atlantic may be undermining the recovery plan on the other side. To us, it seems obvious that public policy should be adjusted to take new data into account. But we need to appreciate the difficulty, complexity, and length of time involved in updating policy. Just as important is recognizing that policymakers often need to take into consideration other parameters, such as the economic value of a policy to their constituencies, when developing policy.

One article in this issue illustrates the need for our community to reach out and collaborate with social scientists to design programs to obtain optimal results for protecting ocean ecosystems and habitats. Although scientific data may indicate that bottom trawling has devastated important, but underappreciated, habitats such as cold-water coral reefs, getting the right policies in place to protect the ocean and its inhabitants for future generations also often requires an understanding of how people value ocean resources—especially when they cannot see them. The article by Armstrong et al. describes how bioeconomic modeling, which “combines biological and economic models to analyze human interactions with nature,” can be used to inform management of cold-water coral habitats. Countries such as Iceland have shown that economic incentives can be used to change behavior and successfully protect fisheries. (See the special report on the sea, “Troubled Waters,” in the January 3, 2009, issue of *The Economist* for a discussion of this topic.)

Over the last couple of decades at least, our community has been successful in forging working relationships, including conducting fieldwork, with scientists outside of our main field of research. Numerous multidisciplinary projects, large and small, have been successfully conducted (check out the *Oceanography* online archive where many of these projects have contributed to special issues and other feature articles). Perhaps it is time to invite more people into our tent—engage social scientists—so that together we provide the best possible information and understanding to policymakers to achieve the desired outcome for protecting the ocean (see also Weaver et al., this issue, on one of the HERMIONE project objectives). Now that the new US president has reaffirmed the federal government's commitment to sound science, and the critical role of science in formulating policies to protect our planet, we have a better chance of being heard.

Ellen S. Kappel
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