

The Human Side of Spiny Lobsters: Situation Assessment of the Commercial Fishery

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Research that supports fisheries management often focuses on the analysis of catch data and monitoring of fish stocks. The success of management actions, however, often depends on social factors, such as trust, social capital, perceptions of fairness, shared mental models, or strong local leaders. We present a methodological framework for understanding fisheries and especially fisheries conflicts. A situation assessment is a qualitative, structured approach to analyzing management situations with a focus on human dimensions. We introduce the foundational concepts and methodologies and present our application of this process to the commercial spiny lobster fishery in the Florida Keys. The spiny lobster fishery is an important fishery and beyond its economic value, it is of social, cultural, and esthetic importance in the Florida Keys. We conducted 40 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in the commercial spiny lobster industry. We solicited input from a variety of stakeholders to form a comprehensive understanding of the fishery, including fishers, scientists, management personnel, and product distributors (i.e. fish houses, exporters). Open ended questions explored five broad themes: Current circumstances, who is involved and how, concerns, vision for the future, and wishes for future engagement. Thematic analysis of the interview materials reveals the presence, meaning, and relationships among themes and concepts in the interview data. Our results provide insights into the relationships between stakeholders, perceptions of power and influence, and help differentiate between positions and interests. This assessment increases our understanding of the Florida spiny lobster fishery, but we also reflect on the limitations of this study and identify potential next steps.