

Perceptions of South Africa's Coastal Policy Formulation Process

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ABSTRACT

GLAVOVIC, B.C., 2006. Perceptions of South Africa's coastal policy formulation process. *Journal of Coastal Research*, SI 39 (Proceedings of the 8th International Coastal Symposium), 920-924. Itajaí, SC, Brazil, ISSN 0749-0208.

This is the second in a series of three articles exploring the adoption of a new approach to coastal management in South Africa, perceptions of the coastal policy formulation process, and lessons learned from this experience. South Africa has adopted a new policy that promotes sustainable coastal development through integrated coastal management. Formulated through the Coastal Management Policy Program (CMPP), it represents a 'sea-change' in thinking compared to the earlier autocratic and biophysical approach to coastal management that virtually ignored issues of justice, democracy and poverty. The main objectives of the CMPP were to: (i) Promote meaningful public participation (ii) Foster scientific integrity to improve knowledge and understanding (iii) Advance integrated coastal management, and (iv) Build a practical policy. To what extent were these objectives achieved? Two surveys were conducted to answer this question. The first focused on stakeholders who participated in the CMPP, and the second on CMPP team members who designed and managed the program. The survey results reveal that the CMPP succeeded admirably in achieving each of its main objectives. Overall, 93.4% of stakeholder respondents were 'supportive' or 'very supportive' of the policy proposals, and 77.7% were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their CMPP experience. CMPP team members reinforced this view. Much, however, remains to be done to secure the necessary political will and build the capacity to move towards the elusive ideal of sustainable coastal development.

ADDITIONAL INDEX WORDS: *Sustainable coastal development, integrated coastal management.*

INTRODUCTION

After an intensive policy formulation process carried out by the Coastal Management Policy Program (CMPP), Cabinet approved *The White Paper for Sustainable Coastal Development in South Africa* in December 1999 (CMPP 2000; GLAVOVIC, 2000a). The policy represents a major shift from earlier views about the coast and how it should be managed (GLAVOVIC, 2000d). The objectives of the CMPP were to: (i) promote meaningful public participation (ii) foster scientific integrity to improve knowledge and understanding (iii) advance integrated coastal management (ICM), and (iv) build a practical policy. Stakeholders who participated in the CMPP, and CMPP team members who designed and managed the program, were surveyed to assess the extent to which these objectives were achieved.

THE SURVEYS

Table 1 outlines the main questions posed in relation to the CMPP objectives and an overall assessment of the program.

Different survey approaches were used to assess the perceptions of the two distinct target groups. A questionnaire was mailed to a stratified random sample of 500 stakeholders from the database of 5057 stakeholders who had participated directly in the CMPP. These stakeholders were dispersed around the coast making face-to-face interviews impractical. There was an 18.8% return rate (n=94). The majority of respondents were English-speaking white males who had at least a high school qualification. Different age categories and sectors were well represented but the regional distribution was dominated by responses from regions with major coastal cities.

¹This paper draws upon my doctoral dissertation (GLAVOVIC, 2000b) and reports prepared for the lead coastal agency (GLAVOVIC, 2000c, d).

There were no significant differences between sectors or regions. The shortcoming of this postal survey approach, however, is that it excluded illiterate stakeholders. These results thus reflect a narrow range of stakeholder views. Further work is needed to gauge the views of other stakeholders, particularly those living in remote areas who are illiterate.

CMPP team members included members of the Policy Committee, Project Management Team (PMT), Regional Managers and Specialist Study Team Leaders. Questionnaires were e-mailed to the CMPP team and follow up personal and telephone interviews were held. Four of the 11 Policy Committee members and three alternates returned completed questionnaires. Nine of the 12 PMT members, four of the five Regional Managers, and two Study Team leaders, one of whom was also a Policy Committee member, returned questionnaires.

PROMOTING MEANINGFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The need to promote constructive opportunities for public participation was arguably the most important challenge in the policy-making arena in South Africa in the mid-1990s.

Participation Opportunities and Support

Stakeholders were asked two questions²: Firstly, *I would describe the opportunities created by the CMPP for public participation as: Very inadequate to very good (plus I don't know). Why do you think so, and how could the public participation process in the CMPP have been improved?* The CMPP provided 'good' or 'very good' opportunities for public participation according to 66.7% of respondents (n=93). Many

²Cabinet had not approved the Draft White Paper at the time of the surveys. As a result, there was some uncertainty about whether or not it would be adopted as recommended. But it was approved without substantive changes.

Table 1. *Analytical framework to assess perceptions of the CMPP.*

CMPP objectives	Coastal stakeholders	CMPP team
Promote meaningful public participation	Create opportunities for public participation Support findings of the White Paper and level of commitment to its implementation	Strengths and weaknesses of the public participation program
Foster scientific integrity to advance understanding	Improve understanding of the coast and its management	Personal understanding of the coast and its management Build upon and extend knowledge and understanding of the coast and its management
Advance integrated coastal management Lay a practical foundation	Balance environmental and developmental issues Address issues of most concern Provide a practical foundation for policy implementation	Promote an integrated coastal management approach Provide an effective basis for practical policy implementation
Overall assessment of CMPP	Personal experience of the CMPP Comparison with other policy initiatives	Personal experience of the CMPP Comparison with other policy initiatives

(22.6%) were 'satisfied' with participation opportunities and only 9.7% thought that the opportunities were 'inadequate'. Several respondents felt that political transformation had created valuable new opportunities for participatory citizenship. Confidence levels in the CMPP team were high because the CMPP was managed in a professional manner and good opportunities for local participation had been created. The CMPP was prominent in the media and stakeholders were well informed about public meetings. There were, however, concerns expressed about under-representation of historically disadvantaged people. Some said that the CMPP 'preached to the converted'. Suggested improvements ranged from securing a higher media profile to creating opportunities for more small group discussions and increased meeting time.

Secondly, *my support of the findings of the White Paper, and my commitment to its implementation, can be described as: Strongly opposed to strongly supportive (plus I don't know). Why do you think so?* There was overwhelming support for the policy findings and a strong commitment to its implementation. Most (93.4%) respondents (n=91) were 'supportive' or 'very supportive', 4.4% were neutral, and only 2.2% were 'opposed' or 'strongly opposed' to the policy. This support came from all sectors, spheres of Government and regions. Many credited their support to meaningful opportunities for public participation: the policy reflected the concerns and hopes of stakeholders.

Respondents also expected the policy to have a positive impact on their lives and coastal livelihoods. Many respondents did, however, qualify their support and expressed concern about limited available human and financial resources to implement the policy. Most respondents were supportive of the policy's focus on building coastal partnerships to implement the policy. But a small minority expressed concern about reliance on cooperation as opposed to a management approach based on scientific analysis and strong enforcement measures. Several respondents felt that the policy did not provide sufficiently clear direction for implementation. A few respondents felt that the policy placed undue emphasis on the needs of historically disadvantaged people at the expense of ecological concerns.

CMPP Team Views on the Participation Process

CMPP team member perceptions were consistent with those of the stakeholder respondents: opportunities for meaningful public participation underpinned the success of the CMPP. The main question posed to the CMPP team was: *What do you think were the strengths and weaknesses of the CMPP public participation program?* Regarding strengths, the key was seen to be credible representative structures and an innovative process that enjoyed widespread support. The CMPP was seen to be 'process-driven', creating opportunities for extensive participation across all interests and regions, with a particular focus on the involvement of historically disadvantaged individuals. The strong focus on developing regional identities and ensuring that regional concerns and viewpoints were systematically included in the process was seen to be a

particular strength. In addition, active involvement at all stages of the policy formulation process was appreciated, creating opportunities for building stakeholder relationships that would ultimately facilitate better coastal management. The integration of technical and scientific information into the public arena helped to increase understanding, and was enhanced by the accessible, informative and well-branded communications products and capacity building materials.

A number of weaknesses were identified. Despite considerable effort to build capacity, the scale of the challenge was beyond the CMPP per se and concern was expressed about the disproportionate influence well-educated stakeholders might have had on the program. Reliance on public meetings and workshops, which are subject to time constraints, was seen to have resulted in 'shallow' public deliberation at times. In addition, some sectors were under-represented in public deliberations, including business, inland stakeholders, labor, local authorities, senior Government officials, tribal authorities, political leaders and coastal communities in remote rural areas. Some CMPP team members felt that more attention needed to have been focused on building a better understanding of the coast. Some felt that meeting preparation was inadequate at times and that facilitation lacked the necessary creativity. It was, however, acknowledged that facilitation experience amongst Regional Managers was very variable and that realistic expectations were needed given the scope and complexity of the CMPP challenge. Some concerns were also expressed about the transition from policy formulation to implementation: there was a danger of losing momentum and watering down the government-civil society partnership.

FOSTERING SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY TO IMPROVE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Two considerations need to be borne in mind when assessing the extent to which the CMPP realized this objective. Firstly, past efforts to develop a coastal policy were reliant on expert input with little public participation. Secondly, compared to investments in understanding the biophysical dimension of the coast, little attention had been focused on the cultural, economic, institutional, political and social dimensions of the coast. The challenge for the CMPP was to develop an understanding of the human dimension of the coast and to broaden and deepen public understanding about the coast and its management.

Stakeholder Understanding

Stakeholders were asked: *My understanding of our coast and coastal management improved as a result of my participation in the CMPP: Not at all to very considerably (plus I don't know). Why do you think so, and how could your understanding and your ability to participate in the CMPP have been further improved?* Most (67.4%) respondents (n=92) said that their

understanding had improved 'considerably' or 'very considerably'; 26.1% indicated that it had improved 'a little' but most of these respondents qualified their response by saying that they were already well informed about coastal matters. Only 4.3% said that their understanding had not improved at all.

In explaining their varied responses, many respondents felt the CMPP had made an important contribution by making information about the coast and its management readily accessible. Furthermore, interaction with other stakeholders during the CMPP had improved their understanding about the needs and concerns of others. Improvements could be made by increasing interaction between coastal specialists and stakeholders, more interactive small-group sessions focused on training and capacity building could have been introduced, and information could be more extensively and timeously distributed prior to public meetings. Some felt that the inherently technical nature of coastal management was a constraining factor. Others felt that language was a barrier as well as the lack of 'free personal time' to develop one's knowledge and understanding.

CMPP Team Views on Understanding

Perceptions of the CMPP team respondents were largely consistent with stakeholder responses. They were asked: *In what way was your understanding of our coast and coastal management influenced by your involvement in the CMPP?* Four main issues were highlighted. Firstly, CMPP respondents viewed their interactions with stakeholders as an enriching experience that increased their knowledge about stakeholder perceptions and concerns. They also learned a lot about public participation and their appreciation of the potential contribution of 'ordinary citizens' grew tremendously. Secondly, respondents developed a new appreciation and understanding of the diversity of the coast and the management challenges it presents. Those without a background in natural sciences learned a great deal about the biophysical dimension of the coast. Respondents gained new insights about the value of ecosystem goods and services, and the interrelationships between the natural and human dimensions of the coast more generally. Thirdly, new understanding was gained about coastal governance and the institutional challenges inherent in promoting ICM; challenges that invariably center on people rather than coastal ecosystems alone. Finally, the most important advancement in knowledge and understanding related to the shift from viewing coastal management as a problem-centered pathology towards a process for unlocking opportunities for sustainable coastal development (SCD).

They were also asked: *To what extent did the CMPP build upon and extend our knowledge and understanding of the South African coast and its management?* There was broad agreement about the valuable contribution made by the CMPP, but there were different views on specific issues. In summary, the main strengths related to the development of an holistic view of the coast and its management. The CMPP was seen to have effectively built on previous scientific research, and CMPP team members had contributed a wealth of specialist knowledge to the program. The synthesis of available information and the effective integration of this information into the public participation process were seen to be a particular strength. Importantly, it was felt that the field of coastal management itself had been advanced through innovative participatory process design. New insights were gained about stakeholder needs and concerns. A more holistic view of the coast as an integrated natural-human system was developed as well as a better appreciation of the socio-economic and political dimensions of the coast. The CMPP brought the value of coastal ecosystem goods and services into sharp focus, and revealed the importance of viewing ICM as a means for unlocking the potential of coastal resources and investing in future SCD opportunities rather than seeing coastal management as a burden on the Government and the fiscus. Coastal partnerships were clearly central to achieving SCD through ICM. The CMPP also highlighted the need for systematic research on coastal

poverty and coastal livelihoods.

A number of weaknesses were also identified. The value of the specialist studies was underscored but concern was expressed about the variable quality of the studies. Notwithstanding the constraints of short time frames and limited information on some topics, it was felt that several studies were of an unacceptably poor quality. Independent review of all studies revealed the challenging circumstances in which the studies were undertaken, and the limited experience of some team members in conducting policy relevant integrated research. It was felt that the PMT had addressed a number of the shortcomings in drafting the policy. But in the future, increased attention needs to be given to improving dialogue between specialists from different disciplines, and between coastal users, managers, political decision-makers and scientists. Attention also needs to be focused on better integrating specialist knowledge and public input. Concerns were raised again about the inevitability of 'shallow' debate under tight timeframes. Several respondents expressed discomfort with the vagueness of the term SCD a consequence of which could be lack of clarity in implementing the policy.

ADVANCING INTEGRATED COASTAL MANAGEMENT

The White Paper aims to manage the coast as a distinctive complex system, retain the coast as a national asset, realize the value of the coast, and unlock the development opportunities provided by coastal resources (CMPP 2000). ICM provides a foundation for reconciling conflicting activities, preventing unsustainable practices from occurring and identifying and realizing opportunities for SCD. ICM is thus an ongoing process of coastal governance, enabling coastal stakeholders to better coordinate their activities and plans. It seeks to overcome the fragmentation that results from prevailing sectoral approaches that are exacerbated by the division of responsibilities between different spheres of government. The White Paper's Plan of Action presents practical steps for developing and implementing an ICM approach. To what extent has the CMPP advanced ICM?

Integrating Environmental and Developmental Issues: Stakeholder Perceptions

A central challenge for ICM is reconciling environmental and development imperatives. Stakeholders were asked: *How well do you think the White Paper balances environmental issues (such as coastal pollution) and developmental issues (such as job creation)? Very poorly to very well (plus I don't know). Why do you think so?*

The White Paper balances these imperatives 'well' or 'very well' according to 46.8% of respondents (n=94); 35.2% felt that these issues were 'satisfactorily' balanced, and 12.7% felt that a 'poor' or 'very poor' balance had been achieved. Respondents generally felt that a good balance had been achieved but thought that the outcome of the policy implementation process would be the real test. Many also indicated that the appropriate 'balance' would vary between regions and localities given the markedly different circumstances along the coast. Opposing reasons were given about whether or not the 'right balance' had been struck, with some saying there was too much emphasis on the environment and others saying there was too much emphasis on development. Some felt that there was insufficient clarity about how to implement and enforce the policy. Others highlighted particular issues that need more focused attention to achieve ICM.

CMPP Team Perceptions about Advancing ICM

The CMPP team was asked: *To what extent did the CMPP promote an integrated approach to coastal management in*

South Africa? Why do you think so? The main strengths related to the explicit attention focused on the need to work collaboratively and integrate management functions across sectors as well as spheres of Government. Moreover, the substantive agreements reached between diverse national interest groups, that had started out from very different positions, and the support received from a wide cross-section of stakeholders, was indicative that the CMPP had already achieved a level of integration. The Plan of Action was seen to have provided a practical foundation for reconciling local, regional and national interests, taking into account coastal diversity without compromising the need to retain the coast as a national asset. The policy was also seen to have effectively integrated perspectives from across many disciplines.

A number of weaknesses were identified. Particular concern was expressed about the woeful capacity constraints at all levels of Government, particularly the local level, to implement the policy. Continued donor support was seen to be essential but not sufficient for effective integrated policy implementation. A closely related concern was the apparently limited support for the policy by politicians and senior Government officials. Notable exceptions were highlighted, but the need to secure a 'political champion' and the commitment of senior DEAT management were seen to be imperative. Opinions also varied about the extent to which local and regional interests had been reconciled. But there was general agreement that tangible local-level action was essential for ICM.

LAYING A PRACTICAL FOUNDATION

Whilst considerable effort had been made in the 1970s and 1980s to lay a practical foundation for better coastal management, unsustainable practices continued unabated in the 1990s. The White Paper aimed to build upon and extend earlier efforts. But it will be to little avail unless the policy rhetoric is translating into reality along the coast. To what extent, then, has the CMPP laid a practical foundation for policy implementation?

A Practical Foundation?: Stakeholder Perceptions

Stakeholders were asked two questions. Firstly, *how well does the White Paper address the coastal issues of most concern to you? Very poorly to very well (plus I don't know). Please give reasons for your answer, describing which issues are of most concern to you.* Nearly half (48.9%) of respondents (n=88) thought that the issues of concern to them were addressed 'well' or 'very well', 37.5% thought they were 'satisfactorily' addressed, and a small minority (12.5%) thought they were 'poorly' or 'very poorly' addressed. Respondents cited a wide range of issues, the more common being coastal pollution, ribbon development, estuary management, preserving coastal wilderness, controlling off-road vehicles, use of marine living resources and controlling recreational development. The main challenge was establishing practical and effective implementation measures.

Secondly, *to what extent does the White Paper provide a practical foundation for implementing the policy? Very limited to very good (plus I don't know). Why do you think so?* It was seen to provide a 'good' or 'very good' practical foundation for implementation by 47.2% of respondents (n=89), with 23.6% thinking it was 'satisfactory', 16.9% felt it was 'limited' and 6.7% thought it was 'very limited'. Reasons for these views varied. Many felt that the White Paper defined roles and responsibilities clearly, and suggested practical legal measures and a logical phased process for building institutional capacity. There were also high expectations that the extensive participation would ensure strong support for effective implementation. Many, however, felt it was difficult to judge the practicality of the policy prior to initiation of implementation efforts. Many also felt that Governmental capacity constraints would make implementation difficult. Others were concerned that Cabinet might not endorse the Draft

White Paper or that its intentions might be altered. Several thought that the policy was too 'academic'.

CMPP Team Perceptions about Policy Practicality

CMPP team members were asked: *To what extent does the CMPP, and the White Paper in particular, provide an effective basis for practical policy implementation?* CMPP team views echoed those of stakeholder respondents. A number of positive attributes were identified. The CMPP had identified and developed awareness of and understanding about the main issues of stakeholder concern. Most felt that the Plan of Action provided a practical foundation for policy implementation and the alignment of the policy to wider political imperatives increased this prospect. Several CMPP team members felt that the DEAT had demonstrated increasing support for the policy, but opinions on this matter varied. Respondents also referred to a number of new initiatives that had their genesis in the CMPP, auguring well for effective policy implementation.

Respondents also pointed out a number of shortcomings. Serious concerns were expressed about limited Governmental capacity for effective implementation. Particular concerns were expressed about the need to provide practical guidance for local level policy implementation. The difficulty of establishing linkages and building partnerships was also highlighted. Furthermore, concerns were raised about limited Governmental commitment and political will to implement the policy. Concerns were also expressed about the anticipated delay between policy formulation and implementation.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE CMPP

There is merit in exploring the overall impact of the CMPP because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

An overall Assessment by Stakeholders

Two questions were posed. Firstly, *my experience of the CMPP could be described as: Very dissatisfied to very satisfied (plus I don't know). Why do you feel this way?* Most (77.7%) of respondents (n=94) were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their personal experience of the CMPP, 12.8% were 'neutral' about their experience and only 7.4% were 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied'. Viewpoints varied. A number felt that their positive CMPP experience reflected the new opportunities created by wider democratic change in the country. Many said that they valued the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to an issue of profound public concern and importance. Many respondents also credited their positive experience to being part of a well-managed process. In general, the Regional Managers were seen to have played a vital role, but individual performance was highly variable. Many respondents were complimentary about the accessibility of documentation, regular feedback, good meeting notification and adequate response time. Most related their positive experience to the opportunities to participate constructively in the process and to seeing that their input was reflected in the final policy. They especially valued the opportunity to learn more about the coast and its management.

Some said that at times the process felt 'rushed', and some felt constrained by insufficient 'free personal time' to participate to the extent they would have liked. Some who were dissatisfied with the CMPP indicated that they were unhappy with existing efforts to address coastal concerns. The root of this problem lay beyond the immediate influence of the CMPP and underscores the challenge that lies ahead in implementing the policy. Some respondents expressed concern about inadequate representation of all interests in public meetings and workshops. Some felt that the process was too 'theoretical'. Several respondents felt that the outcome was pre-determined a 'rubber-stamping' exercise. There was no reason given for this viewpoint.

Secondly, *compared with other national policy initiatives carried out in South Africa in the 1990s, I would rate the CMPP as: Very poor to very good (plus I don't know). Why do you think*

so? (Where possible, please give examples of other policies). The CMPP was rated 'good' or 'very good' by 62.1% of respondents (n=87). No respondents thought that the CMPP was 'poor' or 'very poor' relative to other policy processes. A relatively high proportion of respondents (24.1%) indicated 'I don't know' because they had no first-hand experience of other processes. The overarching reason for this positive response was the opportunity to participate constructively throughout the CMPP.

Overall Assessment by the CMPP Team

Two questions were posed. Firstly, *how would you rate the CMPP in comparison to other national policy initiatives carried out in South Africa in the mid-1990s? Please list those policy initiatives that you have been involved in or are well informed about.* The CMPP compared very favorably to other initiatives. Several respondents were however unable to offer a meaningful comparison because of limited personal experience with other processes. Several respondents pointed out that the real comparison could only be made once the policy had been formally adopted and implemented. The difficulty of making such comparisons was also highlighted given different circumstances, resource levels, etc. The main strengths of the CMPP were seen to be the participatory approach, the integration of technical information into the public arena, good program management, and the introduction of a new approach to coastal management.

Secondly, *describe your overall impression and personal experience of the CMPP.* Respondents were in agreement that the CMPP would be judged a 'success' by any reasonable measure. It was seen to have achieved its objectives: stakeholders had been able to participate on an unprecedented basis; a wide range of specialists from diverse disciplines had been active contributors in advancing knowledge of and understanding about the coast; and a practical and innovative ICM approach had been introduced. All of this was achieved within the budget and timeframe allocated to the process. Most respondents reflected on their contribution with a sense of pride and accomplishment. They felt that the CMPP had created a genuine partnership between Government, civil society and the private sector. The main qualification offered by respondents was the need to confront the massive challenge of building capacity to implement the policy.

CONCLUSIONS

Stakeholders and the CMPP team respondents clearly feel that the CMPP succeeded in achieving its main objectives. The public was afforded real and meaningful opportunities to make a difference in an open, inclusive and transparent policy formulation process. The CMPP advanced understanding about the coast and its management by building on past experience and integrating scientific understanding with local knowledge and societal values. And, most importantly, the process was innovative and practical, introducing a fundamentally new approach to coastal management in South Africa. Ongoing vigilance and effort will, however, be required to further develop and deepen the awareness and understanding of those responsible for implementing the policy, particularly historically disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities. Particular attention will also need to be focused on securing political will and building governmental capacity, especially at the local level, to implement the policy in keeping the policy specifications and its overall intent or 'spirit'.

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