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TITLE: Marine social sciences: Looking towards a sustainable future

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ABSTRACT:

Marine and coastal environments provide extensive and essential ecosystem services upon which much of humanity relies, yet the incorporation of human dimensions into marine and coastal policy and management has historically been lacking. As efforts to address the substantial and diverse challenges facing marine and coastal environments continue, recent years have seen a growing call for greater consideration of people, how they interact with the marine environment, and the resultant implications for developing effective policy and management. Indeed, in recent times recognition of the importance of marine social science research, data, evidence and expertise has undergone an upward trajectory. Despite this growing level of awareness of the value of social science to the wider marine and coastal management agenda, effective and meaningful inclusion of marine social science into research and practice has remained a challenge. Here we approach this global challenge as an opportunity to bring the community together to set a forward-looking international research agenda, recognising the role of multiple approaches and diverse methods understanding the relationship between society and the sea, galvanising the research and practice community across marine social sciences and beyond. Furthermore, by bringing together this increasingly active community, we can identify mechanisms of change and pathways to enable inclusion of marine social sciences within global ocean policy. This paper draws on the views of researchers and practitioners from across the marine social science disciplines, brought together through an expert workshop held at the MARE 2019 conference (June 2019) and representing a range of geographical regions and perspectives. Through the workshop, delegates identified a number of priorities for the ongoing development of the marine social science community, including the need to improve capacity for marine social science research globally, the importance of nurturing an inclusive and equitable marine social science research community and the role of networks to continue to raise the profile of marine social science data and evidence for global ocean policy and management. Additionally, the discussions provided valuable insight into existing knowledge gaps and potential research priorities for the future. Finally, the paper presents a future vision and recommendations for an international and interdisciplinary marine social science agenda, calling for collaborative and strategic thinking on marine social sciences from across the marine science and policy interface. Critically, we show how social science needs to be embedded in all aspects of marine and coastal management in order to create truly sustainable solutions to the pervasive environmental challenges we face.

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