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TITLE: Local ecological knowledge and the management of marine protected areas in Brazil

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ABSTRACT:

This manuscript discusses the role of fishers' Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK) in the management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Brazil. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken at nine MPAs to investigate MPA managers' (n = 9) and higher governmental level authorities' (n = 5) perceptions on these. Varying levels of MPA governance approaches were assessed, from government-led centralized top-down (e.g. marine biological reserves) to community-based bottom-up MPA categories (e.g. marine extractive reserves). The use of fishers' LEK was found to be an essential means of achieving a broader and more diverse knowledge basis for MPA management, though most of the management current in place is still science-driven in Brazil. The full engagement of local knowledge can also be regarded as a means of empowering local communities and promoting responsibility, but only if a more inclusive praxis of participation is put to work. Different meanings for 'Local Knowledge Use' in MPA management were outlined and described for different management approaches (top-down vs. bottom-up). It was noted that each of these meanings brings different outcomes in terms of stakeholder participation and empowerment. It is also suggested that MPA co-management schemes might benefit from the adoption of a 'knowledge-building' instead of 'knowledge-using' approach during a 'problem-solving' instead of 'decision-making' management process. Finally, it is concluded that it will be an enormous challenge to put LEK to work in the benefit of MPAs in the country amidst so many priority actions brought by the problems affecting the Brazilian National System of MPAs. Government must open up the agenda to deliberatively discuss the roles of local knowledge in MPA management, whilst local communities organise themselves and increase the demand for participation with responsibility.

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