

# Impacts of regulatory change on resilience in fisheries

## Policy Briefing: Resilience of Coastal Communities (ROCC) Project

Escalating impacts of climate change and declining fish stocks interact with social, economic and political changes to impact fishers' livelihoods and wellbeing, making resilience a key priority for fisheries management. Research in SW England (55 questionnaire responses and 15 interviews with fishers) reveals a complex relationship between fisheries regulation and resilience. While regulation is essential for sustainable fisheries, regulatory change also can be source of disturbance, impacting fishers' wellbeing and ability to respond to future challenges.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### 1. Regulatory change as a shock or stressor

- Historical regulatory change has impacted fishers' adaptive capacity and resilience to contemporary disturbances.
- Regulatory change itself was perceived by 69% of fishers as a disturbance; for 36% it was the disturbance that they reported having had the greatest impact on their livelihood in recent years.
- Future regulatory uncertainty is a key concern among fishers.

#### 2. Limited ability to adapt

- Fishers' perceived ability to respond effectively to regulatory disturbances was lower compared to other major disturbances e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Fishers impacted by regulatory disturbance were more likely to consider exiting the fishery and were less confident in their ability to cope with future change.

#### 3. Wellbeing impacts undermine resilience

- Regulatory disturbance impacted multiple aspects of wellbeing, including autonomy, financial security and mental health.
- Social relationships were more impacted by regulatory disturbance than by other disturbances.
- Wellbeing impacts limit flexibility and agency, undermining resilience to future disturbances.

#### 4. Governance processes shape resilience

- Fishers find it difficult to exercise their agency to influence regulatory change.
- Regulatory change processes can reinforce inequalities and leave fishers feeling marginalised and undervalued, undermining agency and wellbeing.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Recognise the historical context of regulatory change.** Understand how past regulatory shifts have shaped the current environment by constraining fishers' flexibility and agency to respond to change.

**2. Acknowledge regulatory change as a disturbance to fishing livelihoods.** Recognise the impacts of regulatory change on fishers' wellbeing. To protect the social sustainability of fisheries, establish firm thresholds for impacts that are considered unacceptable.

**3. Consider how regulatory change will impact resilience to future disturbances.** Assess the full impact of regulatory change on the wellbeing and future resilience of fishers. Take action to mitigate negative consequences, tailor changes to different contexts, and support fishers' ability to adapt effectively to future disturbances.

**4. Strengthen social relationships.** Support families, communities and industry networks to help fishers navigate change and to support constructive engagement with regulatory processes in ways that enhance fishers' agency and voice.

**5. Value diverse fisheries.** Ensure that regulatory change processes recognise inequalities across the fleet and are driven by shared values around the pursuit of diverse and thriving fishing communities.