



Case Study 8 Ecosystem-based solutions to solve sectoral conflicts on the path to sustainable development in the Faial-Pico Channel, Azores

Collaborating to halt declining biodiversity:

Despite designation as a Marine Protected Area, biodiversity in the Faial-Pico Channel is falling. Our aim: to collaborate with local stakeholders and policy-makers and apply the AQUACROSS Assessment Framework to understand social and ecological aspects of the Channel, and identify actions to efficiently and equitably ensure the Channel's long-run sustainability, balancing the objectives of commercial and recreational fishers, tourism operators, and other local stakeholders.

Where and what are the challenges?

The Faial-Pico Channel is a richly biodiverse Marine Protected Area (MPA), covering 240km² of North Atlantic coast and ocean in the Azores, an EU Outermost Region. Recreational and commercial fishing place pressure on local biodiversity, while swiftly growing tourism (5.1% p.a.) fuels local economic growth but increases competition for use of the Channel, driving future pressure on biodiversity. While local commercial and recreational fishers, tourism operators, and others all value the Channel's biodiversity, they have different objectives and priorities. In 2016, local policymakers increased protection for some high biodiversity areas in the Channel, and have consulted with stakeholders on management. However, Channel management is complicated by multi-level and overlapping responsibilities, with policy development and implementation split across five institutions.

What was done?

In close collaboration with local stakeholders and policymakers, we applied the AQUACROSS Assessment Framework to develop and evaluate ways to more efficiently and equitably manage the Channel and protect biodiversity. This included:

- Analysing local biodiversity, tourism, and fishing policies and stakeholder objectives to identify synergies, conflicts, and opportunities for improvement

- Characterising the Channel's social-ecological system to understand links between drivers, pressures, the ecosystem and its biodiversity, and ecosystem services
- Identifying and evaluating an ecosystem-based management plan for the Channel
- Co-creation with local stakeholders: throughout, we collaborated with local stakeholders, including at two day-long workshops with recreational and commercial fishers, diving operators, NGOs, scientists, and local policy representatives.

Local recommendations:

We identified and evaluated a plan of five local policy solutions: (1) increased scientific monitoring, (2) increased stakeholder participation through a Stakeholder Advisory Group, (3) integrating and coordinating management of the Channel, (4) clearly communicating and enforcing fishing and biodiversity rules, and (5) sharing costs through a sustainability tax or diving fee. We found that, as well as protecting biodiversity, this plan supports the sustainability of the Faial-Pico Channel – increasing stakeholder engagement, knowledge, and policy coordination enables adaptive management, reduces conflict, and can improve effectiveness and efficiency.

General lessons learned for managing biodiversity:

Stakeholder engagement and participation supports effective and equitable management of Marine Protected Areas. Stakeholders – such as recreational and commercial fishers and diving operators – can clearly identify challenges and priorities, co-create innovative solutions, provide low-cost knowledge and expertise, and support ongoing monitoring, enforcement, and evaluation.

Local impact:

"The AQUACROSS work is being used directly in the creation of Marine Protected Area Management for the Azores, along with other sources" – Gilberto Carreira, Azores Regional Directorate for Sea Affairs (DRAM)

Learn more about Case Study 8 on the AQUACROSS Information Platform and aquacross.eu

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