

Review: Adaptive Governance: The Dynamics of Atlantic Fisheries Management

By D.G. Webster

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller

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To study international fisheries management, D.G. Webster, a researcher at the Wrigley Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Southern California, documents in case studies the fisheries management history of some of the highly migratory fisheries populations to be found in the Atlantic Ocean. There are eight case studies of Atlantic fisheries stock presented covering the tropical tunas (bigeye, yellow, skipjack), billfishes (swordfish (northern, southern) and marlin (blue, white)), and bluefin tuna (western, eastern). The marine management stories presented focus on the management decisions of the ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, and their SCRC, Standing Committee on Research and Statistics.

To explain variance in management measures, Webster develops and studies what she calls a "vulnerability response framework" which in this book is a response of marine management organizational economic flexibility and competitiveness. In the publisher's words "Vulnerability, mainly economic in this context, acts as an indicator for domestic susceptibility to the increasing competition associated with open access and related stock declines" (back cover).

Oran R. Young, Professor of Institutional and International Governance, Environmental Institutions at University of California, Santa Barbara, writes in the foreword that "[Webster's] work will have played a significant role in the ongoing effort to improve our understanding of environmental governance" (p.xiv).

Webster hopes "that the ideas presented here will lead to much more expansive research into other forms of human response to environmental change and resultant patterns of adaptive governance" (p.xv). As presented in her model, ineffective international management can lead to resource depletion, economic recession, growing concern and the need for more management. Effective international management can lead to resource rebuilding, economic rebound, weakening concern, and more management.

The case studies are dense and detailed, telling the stories of the different migratory fisheries populations. To back up the case studies is a large body of research with appendices, including graphs, that are over 90 pages long. One needs to read the diagrams to follow the case studies Webster presents. The case studies build up to the generalities she can make in the concluding chapter. The stories together tell a convoluted story, but Webster finds conclusions. Her work dramatically demonstrates patterns of international government responses to pressures of international change. Though some may find the case studies dense, they reward the close reader and those who work directly in fisheries management, environmental policy making, and institutional studies.

The book also acts as research presentation, presenting and testing a new groundbreaking methodology, the "vulnerability response framework." It does seem apparent that it will be adopted or at least tested further.

Young, who also judges Webster's contribution to his field, writes that "Analysts interested in this topic in the future will have to reckon with Webster's contribution, whether they conclude that some alternative is needed or simply seek to flesh out the vulnerability response framework and to sharpen it for application to a range of specific cases. In either case, her work will have played a significant role in the ongoing effort to improve our understanding of environmental governance" (p.xiv). Webster's book is likely to provide valuable insights into institutional environmental decision making.

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