



Major shipping lane on the West coast of Sweden. Photo credit: Ingemar Pettersson/Azote

## Governing ecosystem-based management: why and how we should think about collaborative networks

- Ecosystem-based management (EBM) has become a leading principle in environmental governance and constitutes an overarching strategy for how to deal with the complexity of environmental challenges
- EBM implies a management process in which an ecosystem-based perspective is evident in management goals and strategies, and guides processes of monitoring and evaluation
- Collaboration across management levels, and stakeholder participation, are prerequisites for EBM
- Collaboration is challenging, however, and the development of networks per se is no guarantee for EBM that is perceived as effective and legitimate
- Knowledge of what types of networks are better suited for collaboration, and how public managers can govern, or promote, such collaboration is important for EBM success



Seagulls and container ship loading in harbor. Photo credit: Nicklas Wijkmark/Azote

### Background: EBM and public policy

Both international and national policies recognize EBM as a guiding principle for conservation management. The so-called Malawi principles, developed within the Convention of Biodiversity and incorporated in national strategies, specify twelve characteristics of an ecosystem approach. EBM aims to conserve the structure and function of ecosystems while acknowledging the need for a balance between conservation and use. The approach implies decentralized management systems, at appropriate scales, and point to the fact that change is inevitable. Moreover, EBM stresses the importance of decentralization, incorporation of all forms of knowledge and the involvement of all sectors of society.

Implementing EBM essentially implies the formation of management structures that a) span political and administrative levels b) cross policy sectors and c) involve organizations and private stakeholders. Thus, EBM requires collaborative networks and our knowledge on the characteristics of successful networks – and how to govern these – is limited. This brief draws on findings from a research project examining five coastal- and marine areas in Sweden to ask why and how we should think about collaborative networks in our endeavor to promote Ecosystem-based management (EBM).

### Key conclusions

This brief reports on findings from two levels of analysis: the national level and the scale of regional/local EBM initiatives.

#### How can public actors at national and regional levels govern networks for more effective and legitimate EBM processes?

- EBM implies a shift in the mode of public management – from state-centered top down control to public network governance. This means that public managers need to think about networks in their attempt to foster EBM.
- Past experiences influence new initiatives and collaboration takes time! Successful EBM processes make use of slumbering network constellations, which are trusted and perceived as legitimate.
- Explicit links between the EBM process and formal government is important since collaboration structures often operate in the shadow of formal political/administrative systems.
- Framing matters. The way the process is defined and presented is critical for engaging relevant stakeholders and achieving acceptance for the process and its outputs
- A trusted project manager to govern the process has proven important for both effectiveness and acceptance.





Children playing at the foot of the bridge to Öland. Photo credit: Kerstin Jonsson/Azote

### Why and how should we think about collaborative networks for successful EBM?

- Network characteristics matter! Networks best equipped to support successful EBM processes are those that involve many different types of actors from different domains. However, it is also important they have either close communication among actors from different domains, and/or a central coordinator
- Critical functions of network governance are facilitation of collaboration through the identification of key stakeholders that help foster links among actors and guiding evolving relationships
- Deliberative choices regarding the selection of network participants, and the commitment of formal government actors in particular, are important for stakeholder acceptance.
- Stakeholder acceptance of the EBM initiative and process is influenced by how the collaborative process is framed, how the EBM process is linked to ongoing management processes and the interests of key stakeholders.

### Caveats

There is no blueprint for effective and legitimate collaborative networks. The context is always important.

Trade-offs are ever-present. EBM is a complex concept that incorporates non-negotiable ecological criteria and vast ambitions about stakeholder involvement and support. There is an inbuilt tension in the concept between ecological and social goals, and between centrally defined goals and local adjustments, that needs to be dealt with from case-to-case.

Effectiveness vs collaboration? While the idea about conservation via collaboration is appealing, the effectiveness of collaborative management could be questioned. When do networks – and network governance – outperform other arrangements and traditional public management? This question remains to be answered.

### Further reading:

This policy brief is based on the following publications.

Bodin, Ö., Sandström, A. and B. Crona (2016) Collaborative networks for effective ecosystem-based management: A set of working hypothesis. *Policy Studies Journal*. Published online January 18th

Sandström, A., Bodin, Ö. och B. Crona (2015) Network governance from the top: the case of ecosystem-based coastal and marine management. *Marine Policy* 55:57-63.

Sandström, A., Crona, B. och Ö. Bodin (2014) Legitimacy in co-management: the impact of preexisting structures, social networks and governance strategies. *Environmental Policy and Governance* 21(1): 60-76.

### Notes

The content in this brief draws on findings from a research project examining five coastal- and marine areas in Sweden to explore why and how we should think about

collaborative networks in our endeavor to promote Ecosystem-based management (EBM).

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### Disclaimer

The contents of this brief are the sole responsibility of the authors and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the funders listed above.

### About us

Stockholm Resilience Centre advances research on the governance of social-ecological systems with a special emphasis on resilience - the ability to deal with change and continue to develop. The centre is a joint initiative between Stockholm University and the Beijer International Institute of Ecological Economics at The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

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### For further information, please contact

Beatrice Crona  
beatrice.crona@su.se  
Stockholm Resilience Centre,  
Stockholm University, SE – 106 91 Stockholm

### Find more information at:

[www.stockholmresilience.su.se](http://www.stockholmresilience.su.se)  
[www.gedb.se](http://www.gedb.se)