

Understanding the policy pathway to research impact

Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy – a pilot case study

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The literature on public policy and related fields has been used to adapt elements of the CSIRO Impact Framework to better explain how science has influenced policy making and ultimately policy outcomes. Key to the adaptation are concepts of information exchange, cognitive reasoning, path dependency, institutional analysis, historical method and decision making.

Background

The way in which CSIRO delivers impact in a public policy setting is not well understood. This pilot study seeks to improve this understanding by examining the role CSIRO played in the Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines (HSP&G). The aim was to answer two key questions:

1. How effective is CSIRO's engagement in policy processes?
2. To what extent did CSIRO contribute to the policy process?

Case study approach

The case study focuses on CSIRO's contribution to the development of a specific government policy: the Commonwealth Fisheries HSP&G. The HSP&G govern and guide the management settings for commercially-targeted species in Commonwealth fisheries, and are designed to ensure that key commercial fish species are managed for long-term biological sustainability and economic profitability.

A key reason for selecting the HSP&G for the pilot study is that it has clear temporal bounds, beginning with a Ministerial Direction in 2005, and ending with the expected release of the revised HSP&G in 2018.

In addition, CSIRO, through its Oceans and Atmosphere Business Unit, has a long-standing relationship with the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), which has been underpinned by a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) since 2010. The key objectives of the MoU are to:

- a. Facilitate the sharing of relevant strategic information with the aim of joint planning and closer alignment of strategies.
- b. Provide a framework for identifying and prioritising key research initiatives and developing associated proposals for research and development and consultancy projects.

MAPPING THE POLICY PROCESS

The case study undertook an 'actor-centric' analysis and examined distinct policy phases to understand the HSP&G development and implementation, as well as the contributions of the various stakeholders (see Fig. 1).

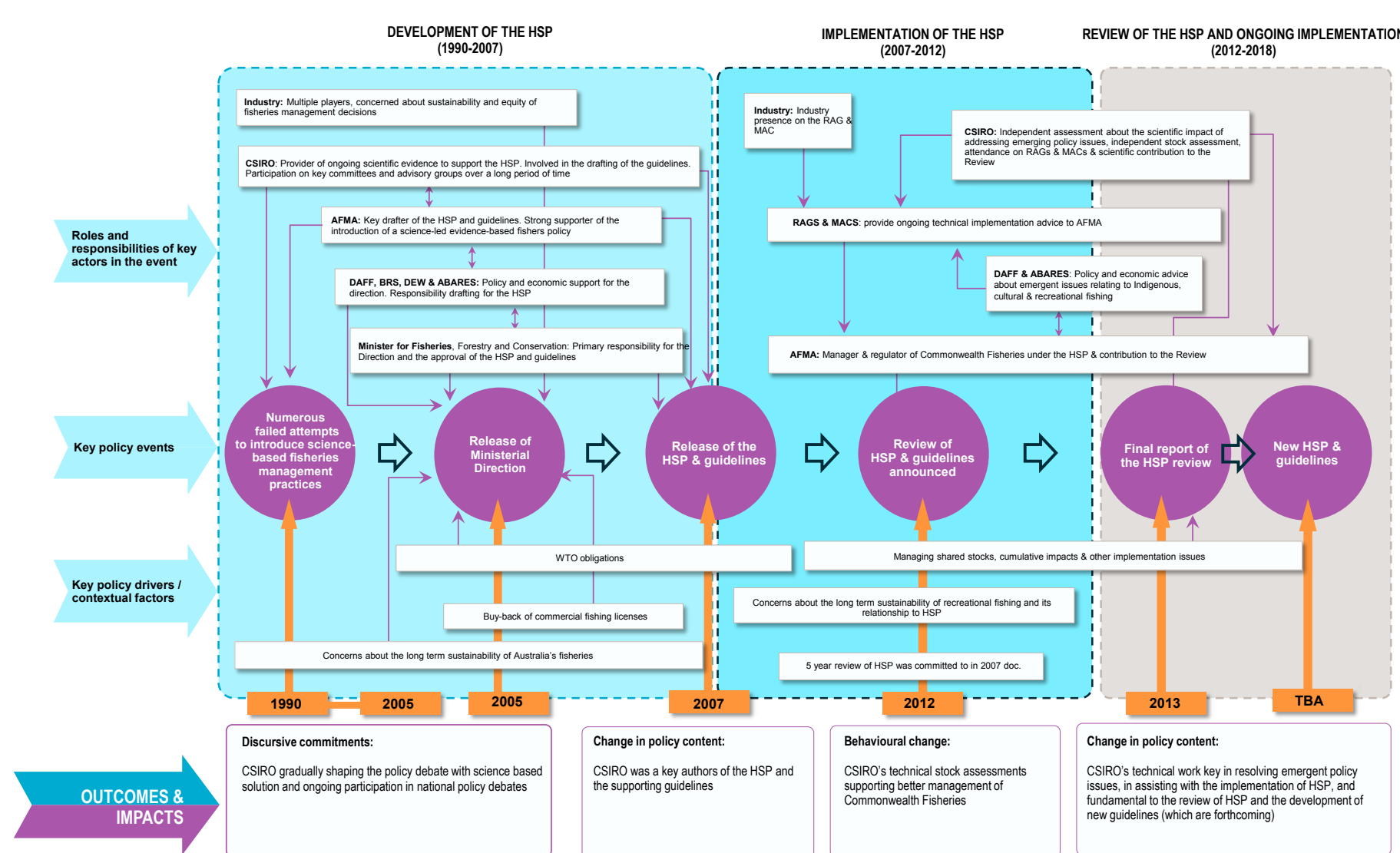


Figure 1: Timeline of events, actors, outcomes and impact.

INDICATORS OF IMPACT ON POLICY

A review of the literature suggests that the following indicators of policy impact are most suitable for application to the fisheries case study.

Table 1: Policy impact indicators.

INDICATOR TYPE	DESCRIPTION	SUB-INDICATORS
ATTITUDINAL	This dimension considers the framing of debates, raising awareness of new issues, influencing political agendas, and affecting attitudes or perceptions of key stakeholders.	Key indicators include change in the awareness, values and beliefs of key stakeholders, changes in public opinion and increased interest in the issue (e.g. number of interest groups concerned)
DISCURSIVE COMMITMENTS	This dimension considers the rhetoric and the language used to discuss issues, as well as the endorsement of international declarations and agreements, as a source of policy impact	Key indicators include increased dialogue on key issues, a shift in the language surrounding debates, and evidence of changed rhetoric (such as major party policy positions)
PROCEDURAL CHANGE	This dimension considers changes in the processes through which policy decisions are made at the local, national and international levels	Key indicators include change in written government/organisational processes and procedures
BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE	Changes in behaviour of key actors and participants in the policy processes, including policy makers and government departments	Key indicators include changes in budgets and expenditure that align with new stated goals
CHANGE IN POLICY CONTENT	Changes in the content of legislation and other regulatory instruments	Key indicators include changes in the text of legislation or policy

Key findings

- CSIRO played a leading role in providing the science that underpins the development of the policy and the guidelines for its implementation.
- The long-term, strategic nature of the engagement, spanning more than 25 years, was highly important and resulted in a high degree of trust between key actors.
- Multiple engagement mechanisms were employed across the continuum of the policy cycle to understand different perspectives and address fisheries management issues.
- CSIRO's breadth of capability and reputation for scientific excellence was valued, not only in a traditional research-provider context but also as a trusted advisor both domestically and internationally.
- CSIRO was viewed as having made a seminal contribution to the policy cycle by the majority of stakeholders.
- Indicators of policy impact – including attitudinal and behavioural changes, discursive commitments, and changes to procedures and policies – were evident in each of the policy phases.

Conclusion and next steps

The pilot study has provided a greater understanding of the activities, relationships and qualities that underpinned the successful translation of scientific research into a specific public policy. The study also demonstrated the importance of being able to engage across the continuum of the policy cycle, at different levels and through diverse mechanisms, which was integral to understanding issues and formulating appropriate, science-based responses. Finally, CSIRO's multidisciplinary capability and international reputation for science excellence, were highlighted as valuable attributes in assisting partners to advance the fisheries management agenda.

However, it would be inappropriate to generalise findings from just one case study to broader lessons for science translation into policy. Further work is needed to gain deeper insights into some elements of this story and to confirm the findings in other areas where CSIRO is thought to have played a role in the policy process.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the significant contribution made by Renate Hays and Jian Wang to the project's activities.