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Fishers' Knowledge in Fisheries Science and Management

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Paperback, 440 pp., figures, tables, maps, photos in black and white, references.

This book is the outcome of the 2001 conference, 'Putting Fishers' Knowledge to Work', inspired by the late Bob Johannes, best known for his work documenting the value and utility of traditional, small-scale fishers' knowledge for conservation and management. The contribution adds to a large and growing literature seeking to address a fundamental challenge: how can fishers' knowledge be utilized in fisheries science and management? Drawing on case studies from around the world, this collection focuses on where and how fishers' knowledge is already being used rather than just more reporting on the value and potential of fishers and their knowledge.

After a brief but thoughtful introduction, the first chapter sets the stage when Johannes and Neis present several widely recognized and practical benefits attributed to fishers' anecdotal information. While many of their examples will be familiar to fishery scholars, the chapter nicely illustrates that as important as it is to avoid dismissing fishers' knowledge for being unscientific, we also need to be careful not to romanticize it. For example, in some cases fishers' explanations may be incorrect, but their observations are accurate and useful. The authors advise us to pay 'particular attention to areas of agreement and disagreement between scientific and fishers' knowledge' and they tell us this 'can contribute significantly to improved understanding and to advancing the knowledge of both groups'.

The collection is organized into two sections of 19 impressive case studies: indigenous/artisanal fisheries and commercial fisheries. The first five case studies provide experience from indigenous authors with practical experience from Pacific Canada, Malawi and Hawaii. These chapters attest to the

richness of fishers' traditional ecological knowledge, but as interesting as they are, they tend to focus on describing fishers' knowledge and its 'potential' use, rather than showing us how it is in use already. An exception is the chapter by Poepoe, Bartram and Friendlander that focuses on how fishers' knowledge is used in a contemporary Hawaiian community. The next 10 chapters provide case studies of researchers working with indigenous and artisanal fishing communities. These diverse case studies include Vanuatu, Australia, Indonesia, Philippines, Laos, Bangladesh, Brazil, Mexico and Sweden. Finally, the last four case studies concern commercial fisheries in the north-east USA, Canada and Australia. I was left wondering why more attention was not paid to this group of fishers.

The most valuable chapters were those that provided accounts of the lessons learned, or to use Ames' words, the 'pitfalls to avoid'. Ames' reflections on the challenges of interviewing fishers and processing their information were instructive. Jones also reflected on the limitations of doing oral histories. Stanley and Rice went further than the other authors in their discussion of 'full scientific partnership by fishers' – that is, going beyond using fishers as either data collectors or knowledge sources, and while doing so provided important lessons concerning the risks and benefits of such endeavours, underscoring the critical role of communication.

Overall, the collection of case studies illustrates the diversity of efforts to put fishers' knowledge to work in scientific research and management. It was somewhat disappointing that a better synthesis was not to be found, although the effort by Haggan and Neis was notable. To the editors' credit, the diversity of material makes such a synthesis difficult.

This volume adds to the growing literature on fishers' knowledge and is an important contribution towards moving away from efforts focused solely on gathering fishers' knowledge and towards understanding attempts to actually utilize such information. This book is a must for those who want to see fishers' knowledge put to work and, therefore, is a fitting tribute to Bob Johannes.

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