

# THE NATURE–CULTURE BOUNDARY AND OCEAN POLICY: GREAT BARRIER ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND\*

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**ABSTRACT.** This article analyzes New Zealand's rights-based system of fisheries management from the perspective of local stakeholders on northern Great Barrier Island. The research identified differing perspectives through use of the concept of "boundary construction," not only in terms of society and nature but also among societal institutions. Great Barrier Island participants exhibited significant differences, especially between staff of the local Department of Conservation and local Maori, both of whom were engaged in negotiating policy implementation at the local level. These differences expressed themselves in conceptions of both societal boundaries—the scale at which community was envisioned—and conceptions of the boundary between nature and culture. The findings confirm the need for the continued development of models of community-based resource management as well as for the conceptual integration of society and nature in the realm of policy construction. *Keywords:* boundaries, fisheries, hybridity, nature/culture, New Zealand.

Beginning in the 1980s, fisheries policy across the world moved toward closed access to resources through the development of rights-based management. Governments implemented these policies in order to solve the problem posed by overcapitalized fishing industries where fishing capacity exceeded the desired yearly total allowable catch. Management changes have been made in the context of a global emphasis on market-based approaches to resource management in the even larger context of neoliberalism, which posits the market as the main tool for resource allocation (Mansfield 2004, 565). Rights-based management is an attempt to "rationalize" fisheries. It accepts the neoclassical economic concept of rational behavior, in which individuals maximize individual profit and which sets up management structures that prevent the "tragedy of the commons" (p. 567).

New Zealand faced overfishing and responded by constructing a rights-based management structure. By the late 1970s New Zealand's inshore fishery had become overcapitalized, and stocks of fish showed signs of severe depletion (Sharp 1997, 510). A Labor government took office in 1984 and began to apply a neoliberal ideology to the whole of government and society, including the development of a rights-based approach to fisheries (Simons 2004, 3). The policy regime evolved into New Zealand's current quota management system, a rights-based system of management with two key structural pillars: the total allowable catch and the individual transferable quota. The Ministry of Fisheries sets the total allowable catch each year through the use of information from research and catch records (Batstone and Sharp 1999, 177–178). Individual quotas are transferable property rights allocated to fishers in the form of the right to harvest from stocks (Clark, Major, and Mollett 1989, 131).

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