

Responsibilisation in fish habitat rehabilitation and stewardship

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Abstract: Neoliberal thought has influenced how government policy is crafted, resulting in a stepping away by government in the implementation of policy solutions, and an ever-growing list of non-state actors enlisted to advance environmental policy agendas. The actions of these non-state actors are positioned as integral to solving environmental policy challenges such as habitat rehabilitation. Drawing on the theory of responsibilisation as a technique of governance this research explores the ways fisheries stewardship policy seeks to mobilise non-state actors to accept responsibility for addressing environmental problems which have previously been the responsibility of the State. Dvora Yanow's approach to interpretive policy analysis is used to analysis key policy artefacts to identify the discursive strategies used to attribute blame for fish habitat degradation and responsibility for rehabilitation actions in an Australian state. This research uncovers a tension between the attribution of blame for the degradation of fish habitats and attempts to mobilise recreational fishers to take responsibility for remediation action through engaging in voluntary rehabilitation actions. An analysis of the selected texts highlights how recreational fishers are constituted as moral, political and authoritative actors, and by extension responsibilised to ameliorate degraded fish habitats.

Keywords: responsibilisation, stewardship, interpretive policy analysis, recreational fishing.

Introduction

One of the more profound challenges in environmental governance lies in responding to the myriad diffuse threats to ecosystems to ensure their ongoing social and economic utility and ecological sustainability. The core challenge for government lies in determining how best to deploy increasingly limited public resources in the most effective manner to respond to these policy challenges (Howes *et al.*, 2015). An ever-growing list of non-state actors—individual citizens, community groups, as well as other non-government and business entities—have been enlisted to advance environmental agendas (Shamir, 2008, Jansssen and Estevez, 2013). This positioning of the actions of non-state actors as panacea to solving environmental policy challenges is a sufficiently significant shift of responsibility from the state to be worthy of academic and policy attention.

One of the hallmarks of neoliberalism has been a move by state actors to rely on non-state actors to perform tasks traditionally carried out by the state (Shamir, 2008). This move has extended to the realm of natural resource management and has manifested through the actions of fisheries managers seeking to integrate recreational fishers into solutions to some of the most pressing environmental challenges. A desire by policymakers to mobilise recreational fishers and increase their involvement

in participatory stewardship activities can be analysed through the concept of responsabilisation. Responsibilisation refers to the expectation and assumption of the reflexive moral capacities of social actors (Shamir, 2008). The remote and indirect actions of the state are enabled by the establishment of a form of self-hood, whereby the agent (here, recreational fishers) produces the ends of government themselves, allowing the state to govern at a distance (Pyysiäinen *et al.*, 2017). Authority and rule are exercised by individuals acting upon themselves, rather than giving way to some externally enforced agent, such as the state (Pyysiäinen *et al.*, 2017).

This paper explores the movement towards public stewardship of natural capital, and the trend towards devolving responsibility for the management of fisheries habitat to non-state actors. A case based study of fisheries policy in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW) is used to explore the ways that recreational fishers have been responsabilised to shoulder a disproportionate stewardship burden in ameliorating environmental problems. Whilst this burden is framed in terms of civic responsibility, it is ultimately a manifestation of responsabilisation.

The public stewardship of natural capital

Stewardship can be understood as ‘the responsible use (including conservation) of natural resources in a way that takes a full and balanced account of the interests of society, future generations, and other species, as well as of private needs, and accepts significant answerability to society’ (Worrell and Appleby, 2000: 263). Central to the concept of stewardship is the idea of looking after something ‘in trust’ for someone else, be that nature, society or future generations (Worrell and Appleby, 2000). Engendering high levels of stewardship amongst users of natural resources is viewed as an important policy outcome because it fosters support for rehabilitation and conservation measures, even when these place restrictions on the use of or access to these resources (Granek *et al.*, 2008). Statutes and regulations prescribing unconditional environmental standards, with punitive consequences are considered to be key components of the traditional regulatory toolbox, and can form part of the regulatory mix deployed by policymakers (Preston, 2012). The trend thus far, however, has been for policymakers to adopt an approach which actively constructs and deploys notions of stewardship in an effort to generate public good conservation outcomes, rather than solely relying on statutory obligations (Cooke and Moon, 2015). This trend can be partly explained by a reconfiguration of the societal role played by both state and non-state actors.

There is a significant body of political theory advocating for an increasingly participatory style of government – one in which the citizenry has the opportunity to have meaningful input into decisions that will impact them (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2014). This has coincided with a shift in perceptions of the public as being a homogenous group to being perceived as diverse and heterogeneous (Cameron and Grant-Smith, 2005). A more participatory approach has also been linked to a growing acceptance that many of the key challenges facing society today – particularly complex social and environmental issues – may be best resolved by sharing responsibility with, and with the input of the stakeholders who are directly impacted by them (Head, 2007, Grant-Smith and Edwards, 2011, Serrao-Neumann *et al.*, 2015).

The mere presence of policy instruments, legal frameworks, and support programs does not in and of its own result in better public participation or policy outcomes. Arguably, genuine public participation strategies (particularly those that vest power in the hands of the community) could significantly

improve engagement by the community with planning and environmental management decisions, encourage collective debate and reinforce the legitimacy of final decisions, if executed correctly (Serrao-Neumann *et al.*, 2015). Whether such involvement necessarily flows on to deliver high quality outcomes is contested (Brody, 2003, Serrao-Neumann *et al.*, 2015). There are clear barriers to effective participation, with the obvious one being the reluctance of policymakers to devolve power and control of decisions, in conjunction with the responsibility of carrying out participatory activities, to targeted actors (Head, 2007, Serrao-Neumann *et al.*, 2015). By necessity, this also raises the question of whether this power and control should be devolved, or indeed whether the citizenry should accept such a devolution. In an environmental context, concerns have also been voiced regarding the lack of measurable conservation outcomes achieved, combined with those criticising participatory governance as a manifestation of neoliberal thought (Fletcher, 2010). Faced with trying to solve complex environmental problems, governments tend to rely on solutions driven by technocrats, who construct participatory processes which reinforce the beliefs of policymakers (Fletcher, 2010)

Critical social science engagement with natural resource management has increasingly engaged with the concept of neoliberalism, due to its predominance in shaping contemporary policy and discourse (Fletcher, 2010). The relationship between the environment and neoliberalism, with its calls for allowing ‘the market’ to address environmental governance issues, is one that is complex and inexplicable (Mansfield, 2004). The impacts of this restructuring of economic and social life, as well as on the management of natural capital, have been immense (Meynen and Doornbos, 2004). These impacts include: the privatisation of functions previously performed by the state through putatively market-based schema, the rescaling of governance and devolution of regulatory responsibilities to local government (often without proportional transfers of power), and a shift from relying solely on binding laws to achieve compliance to increasingly voluntary, neocorporatist regulatory frameworks premised on non-binding standards and self-regulation, public-private cooperation and greater participation from the citizenry (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004, Fletcher, 2010). This shift is evident in the policy instruments that are being deployed by governments across jurisdictions in an endeavour to deliver sustainable ecological outcomes.

The move towards neoliberal modes of governing has seen an increasing emphasis on the role that private actors can play in the delivery of services that historically have been seen to be the responsibility of government (Gray, 2009, Soneryd and Uggla, 2015, Mitlin and Bartlett, 2018). An important assumption underpinning contemporary Western capitalism, and neoliberal governance in particular, is that processes of governing and responsibility-taking are interlinked (Pyysiäinen, *et al.*, 2017). Whilst interpretations around the tasks which should fall within the purview of the public and private sectors have swung over time (Reinecke and Ansari, 2016), there has been a clear trend in recent years to shifting responsibility to non-state actors, and to encouraging civil society actors to accept additional responsibilities, without a commensurate transfer of power (Gray, 2009, Thörn and Svenberg, 2016). State policy actors have mobilised individuals, private enterprise, and communities, while divesting themselves of the responsibility of meeting the social, environmental and economic needs and aspirations of the citizenry (Ilcan and Basok, 2004). This process is known as responsabilisation, a concept which serves as the practical link connecting ideal-typical schemes of governance to the practices of policymakers on the ground (Shamir, 2008).

Responsibilisation operates at the level of the individual, reconfiguring roles and identities in order to mobilise designated actors to undertake and perform self-governing tasks (Shamir, 2008, Summerville and Adkins, 2008). As a technique of governance, it is squarely premised on the construction of moral agency as a necessary precondition for ensuring an entrepreneurial, self-sufficient disposition in the citizenry, and socio-moral authority in institutions (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004, Shamir, 2008). A unifying theme across neoliberal policy programs is the desire to create congruence between economic rationality and moral responsibility (Shamir, 2008). In the neoliberal paradigm, networks consisting of government agencies, businesses, environmental advocacy groups and other stakeholders are established to either self-regulate (based on discourses of moral responsibility) or to establish standards and codes which are meant to function as either an alternative to, or complement to, traditional regulations (Thörn and Svenberg, 2016).

A case study of responsibilisation in fisheries habitat rehabilitation

Through a process of cyclical corpus building (Mautner, 2008) forty key policy artifacts deemed to be significant carriers of meaning were collated and analysed. These included policy documents, legislative and regulative texts, government reports, brochures, social media posts and other materials explicitly or implicitly authored by the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI), which at the time of the study was the relevant department with carriage of fisheries in NSW. Texts were selected where the primary focus was on the construction of the problem of fish habitat degradation in the NSW fishery, or on the framing of solutions to respond to the stated constructed problem. A purposive method of text selection was utilised, which attempted to capture the important texts – ‘those which are widely distributed, that are associated with changes in practices, or that were produced in reaction to a particular event’ (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 73). The selected texts were authored during the period 2009 – 2018. Taken together, the collated corpus of naturally occurring data (Silverman, 2011) provides a useful insight into the NSW DPI’s strategic aims.

Yanow’s (2000) approach to interpretive policy analysis informed the methodological decisions made in the course of this study. Interpretive policy research encompasses a range of analytical approaches which are primarily aimed at studying language through narratives and discourses, objects via symbols and programs, and actions via rituals and observations (Yanow, 2000; Wagenaar, 2006; Hendricks, 2007). Interpretive policy analysis has been used in a number of environmental governance contexts, and has provided new ways of thinking about contemporary environmental policy challenges (Grant-Smith, 2015, Aukes *et al.*, Behagal *et al.*, 2017, Osborne and Grant-Smith, 2017). The texts were analysed through a process which involved: identifying policy artefacts that were significant carriers of meanings and the communities for whom this meaning was shared, identifying the meanings being communicated through these artefacts and their entailments, key points of conflict and conceptual sources, and finally exploring the implications of different ways of understanding and ways of bridging these differences (Yanow, 2000). Through the interrogation of language, representations, and absences, interpretive policy analysis can be used as a mechanism to understand and uncover implicit and explicit policy intentions (Osborne and Grant-Smith, 2017). Specifically the analysis identified how the NSW DPI frames fisheries habitat degradation, how solutions to the degradation are constructed, and which stakeholders groups are attributed with responsibility for enacting the articulated policy solutions.

Findings

The term recreational fishing captures non-commercial fishing activities which are not the fisher's primary resource for meeting their essential nutritional requirements (Granek *et al.*, 2008). As an activity, recreational fishing is extremely popular, with approximately ten per cent of the global population participating in it in any given year (Granek *et al.*, 2008). Participation rates in Australia are slightly above the global average, with around three million Australians participating in the activity each year (Copeland, 2012, Barwick *et al.*, 2015). The most recent figures for NSW suggest that around 12% of the population participate in recreational fishing each year (Department of Agriculture and Water Services, 2018). The recreational fishing industry makes a significant contribution to social and economic life in Australia, with the activity contributing an estimated \$1.8 billion per annum to the national economy and sustaining around 90,000 jobs (Department of Agriculture and Water Services, 2018). Recreational fishers themselves have become powerful stakeholders in fisheries management, as is evidenced by their influence over the policy processes governing recreational fishing activities in NSW.

The case study which forms the basis of in this research project meets Flyvbjerg's (2006) definition of a critical case, as it provides a valuable opportunity to understand how the degradation of NSW fish habitats is framed in stewardship policy, how the solutions to the degradation of NSW fish habitats are constructed, and which stakeholders are attributed blame for enacting the constructed solutions. Within the Australian context, policymakers in NSW have been at the forefront of policy enactments whose primary aims are to mobilise stakeholders to volunteer to ameliorate degraded fish habitats and to increase involvement in participatory stewardship activities. Through the NSW DPI, the NSW Government has been a key driver in establishing networks such as the Fish Habitat Network and the Fishers for Fish Habitat program, both of which are focused on mobilising recreational fishers to increase their involvement in participatory stewardship activities (Fish Habitat Network, n.d, NSW DPI, n.d.). The focus of the NSW DPI on increasing participation in stewardship activities, and the availability of artifacts authored by the NSW DPI which are evidence of pursuit of this aim, provides an excellent context through which to explore the concepts central to this research

Changing stewardship responsibilities in fisheries habitat management

Climate change, overexploitation of resources, habitat destruction and pollution have contributed to the degradation of the world's fisheries (Granek *et al.*, 2008, Al Mamum, 2015). NSW has a diversity of fish habitats, including the presence of cooler high country, warm interior freshwater systems, a narrow continental shelf, and coastline interspersed with beaches, estuaries and rocky headlands (NSW Parliament, 2010). There have been numerous studies conducted which suggest there has been significant loss and degradation of fish habitats in NSW since European settlement (Balcombe *et al.*, 2011, Rogers *et al.*, 2016). For example, the extent of fish habitat in coastal NSW that is either degraded or completely lost since European settlement has been calculated at 62, 258 ha, which equates to over 70% of the total area at the time of European settlement (Rogers *et al.*, 2016). In an assessment of fish species, hydrology and macro-invertebrates, Davies *et al.* (2010) found twenty out of twenty four river basins to be in poor or very poor condition. Up to 97 per cent of assessed river length in NSW has been modified, and fish passage in many rivers and creeks has been blocked by floodgates, weirs, causeways, and impoundments, the combined impact of which has a negative influence on levels of production of fish species (NSW Parliament, 2010).

When articulating the threats to fish habitat, the NSW DPI names the destruction of fish habitat as the primary threat to the ‘health, abundance and diversity of fish in NSW’ (NSW DPI, n.d.-a: para 1). The NSW DPI names diffuse activities including agriculture, urban and industrial development, and land use as activities which have impacted on marine environments. This can be seen in statements such as ‘urban development associated with heavily populated areas has altered marine environments’ (NSW DPI, n.d.-i: para 2) and ‘agriculture, urban and industrial development has impacted... through land clearance, agriculture, dredging, reclamation and water development’ (NSW DPI, n.d.-a: para 2). In this series of texts, the NSW DPI names eleven threats to fish habitat: acid sulfate soils, barriers to fish passage, climate change, cold water pollution, degradation of riparian vegetation, fish kills, impacts of urban and rural development, pests and diseases, removal of large woody debris, water flow and block and chain in sensitive habitats (NSW DPI, n.d.-a).

Throughout the analysed policy artifacts, causality is attributed in broad, diffuse terms to a range of human-induced activities. These activities include (amongst others) urban and rural development, the introduction of species and pathogens, construction of structures which amend water flow, and clearing of riparian vegetation. The absence of attribution of blame for the problem of fish habitat degradation to actors who are having the greatest impact on these habitats is consistent across the corpus of texts analysed. As the NSW DPI (2016: 2) states ‘rivers, creeks and wetlands through NSW have undergone extensive changes due to urban, industrial and agricultural development.’ In these texts, however, there is an apparent reluctance to attribute causality for any of the key identified threats to specific stakeholders or users of fish habitats. Although there is some evidence that recreational fishing is as negatively impactful as commercial fishing, there is significant disagreement relating to this among key stakeholders, and regardless the damage through these activities pales in comparison to other sources (NSW Parliament, 2010, Young *et al.*, 2016). Instead, for the most part, the attributed causes are able to be linked back to developers, agricultural interests and farmers, commercial interests, and government action (or inaction, as the case may be).

In order to prevent further degradation, and ameliorate the damage already done, policymakers have sought to rely on a range of regulatory measures in order to ensure the ongoing social and economic utility of fisheries, and to balance the competing priorities of resource use and preservation (Al Mamun, 2015, Young *et al.*, 2016). Examples include legislation that limits the number and size of fish that fishers are able to catch, when and where fishers are able to access particular environments, and the technology and gear that fishers are able to use (Cooke *et al.*, 2013). However, governments are increasingly moving away from wholly relying on compliance with legislative and regulatory mechanisms in order to achieve environmental policy aims. Instead, there is a trend towards deploying policy instruments to foster participatory behaviours amongst key stakeholder groups in order to deliver environmental governance solutions. In the fisheries arena, this includes targeting recreational fishers (Copeland, 2012).

Fisheries management has historically tended to rely on ad-hoc, reactive approaches to policy development and enactment. On occasion, these approaches have sometimes failed to produce desired behavioural changes, which may be attributed to the objectives, possible actions and resulting outcomes being treated as simple and known (Irwin *et al.*, 2011). Whilst the traditional regulatory toolbox used to manage recreational fisheries is diverse, it is apparent that policymakers see an opportunity to deploy new mechanisms in order to achieve compliance and environmental objectives, relying heavily on voluntarism (Cooke *et al.*, 2013). With this in mind, this research identified that

there is a lack of discursive connection between which actors are framed as the causal agents of the degradation of fish habitat in NSW and which users are ascribed responsibility for implementing the constructed solutions. This is a clear point of conflict within the analysed texts. By keeping the blame for fish habitat degradation diffuse, the collated corpus of texts, whose audience is primarily recreational fishers, do not provide the full story. There is a significant disconnect between causal attribution, and the attempts to responsabilise recreational fishers to take ownership of the problem of degraded fish habitats. The mobilisation of recreational fishers occurs in a seemingly decontextualised, depoliticised mode, and from the analysed texts it is unclear whether this is recognised by policymakers.

Shifting responsibility for fisheries habitat management

If actors are understood in terms of the consequences that flow from their actions as rights and duty bearing units, then a shift in the rights and duties assigned to actors will change the social consequences of their actions and simultaneously the discursive nature of their agency (DeWinter, 2001, Shamir, 2008). This position has previously been articulated in the context of corporations assuming socio-moral obligations that were once considered solely the role of the state. Although focussing on recreational fishers, the implications of this can be extended to citizens more broadly. Through the prism of responsabilisation, one can see a discursive shift underway, with social actors taking on additional responsibilities for tasks previously within the purview of the state. Abrahamsen (2004) frames citizens as agents who are conscripted – active creators of their own future rather than objects of external statist benevolence. This research suggests that ideally, this is how policymakers would like to position non-state actors such as recreational fishers – rather than people passively benefiting from the NSW DPI remedying degraded fish habitat themselves, instead recreational fishers are being positioned to take charge of their destinies and that of the environments of which their leisure activity depends. In such a paradigm, responsibility can be understood as one of obligation to those individuals care about the most – their family, neighbours, colleagues, and ultimately the community (Summerville and Adkins, 2008). Whilst in the corpus of analysed texts a broad array of stakeholders are ascribed responsibility for certain solutions, recreational fishers are the primarily attributed with carrying out their implementation. This is arguably as a result of both the sheer number of people engaging in recreational fishing as an activity, as well as a result of the vested interest that recreational fishers have in quality fish habitat.

Responsibilised actors, be they individuals or those acting as part of a club, are constructed as virtuous, particularly when they accept responsibility for maintaining the property of the state. For example: ‘... Bass Sydney took matters into their own hands and applied to Council for co-management of the reserve. With approvals granted, the Club applied for a habitat action grant to initiate rehabilitation of the site’ (NSW DPI 2016: 6). In this case example, the NSW DPI state that the Club are ‘aware that their hard efforts need to be preserved’ and that they have committed to maintaining the site (which is an asset owned by the State) for five to ten years (NSW DPI 2016: 6). The case example further notes that the Club has reached the ‘considerable milestone’ of 1000 hours of volunteer labour allocated to maintaining and restoring this site (NSW DPI 2016: 6). The actions of the Club are lauded and celebrated by the NSW DPI as a positive example that other clubs can follow. Although the efforts of the Bass Sydney Club were considerable, non-state actors are often encouraged to start small - ‘We all just need to start somewhere, even in our own backyard’ (NSW DPI 2016: 12). Within this context, the term ‘our own backyard’ is used to refer to state assets.

The responsabilisation of recreational fishers

The analysis of the selected texts provides evidence of a desire to shift how governmental authority is deployed, with an emphasis on voluntary mechanisms operating in concurrence with regulatory mechanisms that have the coercive backing of the state. Recreational fishing remains a highly regulated activity. The NSW DPI has used a number of rhetorical devices to shape perceptions, and encourage collaboration between recreational fishers and relevant government authorities at the state and local level. The former Executive Director Fisheries NSW, Dr Geoff Allan stated ‘Fish habitats underpin the productivity of our State’s fisheries resources. It is therefore vital that the government and community work together to protect and restore them, in order to sustain our fisheries in the long-term’ (NSW DPI, 2013: iii). The use of the word community here is contextual, with the implication being recreational fishers and users of fish habitats are the key stakeholders who need to work with government to protect and restore fish habitat.

The NSW DPI encourages collaboration between recreational fishers and local, state and federal government, in order to rehabilitate degraded fish habitat. This is achieved through praising actors who ‘took matters into their own hands’ (NSW DPI 2016: 6) as well as through celebrating outcomes which ‘significantly demonstrated that small community groups can collaborate with government to achieve positive outcomes for native fish’ (NSW DPI: 2016: 10). The NSW DPI uses phrases like ‘strategic partnerships’ when advocating for collaborative efforts, and links the projects delivered through these partnerships back to the improved utility of fish habitat targeted by recreational fishers (NSW DPI, 2016: 7). Increasing the participation of non-state actors, particularly those who are perceived to a stake in the issue at hand, provides an opportunity for the state to govern through regulated choice by strategically creating moral, autonomous actors with ethical commitments to those around them (Summerville and Adkins, 2008).

What is apparent here is that the NSW DPI is advocating disjunctive ideologies and goals through the message of ‘more habitat equals more fish’, and the use of case studies to highlight what volunteers can achieve in conjunction with the state. The analysed texts construct recreational fishers as empowered volunteer citizens who are meaningfully able to improve the quality of natural capital for the benefit of themselves, their communities, and for future generations. This construction of recreational fishers may be conceptualised through two frames. The first is one that is individualised, focusing on the benefit to the recreational fisher herself through increased fishing opportunities that arise as a result of the improvements to habitat. The second is collectivised, emphasising a goal of giving back to the community and to future generations. These two frames are mutually reinforcing, however they exist in a relationship of uneasy tension, particularly given that much of the damage to fish habitats is caused by sources which recreational fishers have no control over.

Discussion

Whilst the traditional regulatory toolbox used to manage recreational fisheries is diverse, it is apparent that policymakers see an opportunity to deploy new mechanisms in order to achieve compliance and environmental objectives, relying heavily on voluntary behaviours by key stakeholders. With this in mind, this research identified that there is a lack of discursive connection between which actors are framed as the causal agents of the degradation of fish habitat in NSW and which users are ascribed responsibility for implementing the constructed solutions. This is a clear point of conflict within the

analysed texts. By keeping the blame for fish habitat degradation diffuse, the collated corpus of texts, whose audience is primarily recreational fishers, do not provide the full story. There is a significant disconnect between causal attribution, and the attempts to responsabilise recreational fishers to take ownership of the problem of degraded fish habitats. The mobilisation of recreational fishers occurs in a seemingly decontextualised, depoliticised mode, and from the analysed texts it is unclear whether this is recognised by policymakers.

The participation of non-state actors in delivering policy solutions is often framed as positive - public participation tools, including IAP2 (2014) can be viewed as participatory buffets from which appropriate strategies can be selected based on levels of risk and the complexity of the issues at hand. An analysis of the selected texts highlights however how non-state actors – and particularly recreational fishers – are being constituted as moral, political and authoritative actors by the NSW DPI, and by extension are being responsabilised to ameliorate degraded fish habitats. While the resourcing pressures which policymakers are dealing with need to be recognised, it could be suggested that recreational fishers are being expected to shoulder a disproportionate stewardship burden. Whilst this burden is framed in terms of civic responsibility, it is ultimately a manifestation of responsabilisation.

There is a clear tension underpinning how government resources are deployed in order to ensure the ongoing social, environmental and economic utility of natural resources. What is self-evident is that, in the contemporary neoliberal paradigm, governments do not have the resources or the capacity to solely shoulder the responsibility for ameliorating degraded fish habitat. The core contemporary challenge for government lies in determining how to best deploy limited resources in order to achieve policy aims. Australian policymakers have looked to the international experience in mobilising recreational fishers and may be attempting to replicate that success. What does not appear to have been acknowledged is that recreational fishers are being disproportionately ascribed the responsibility for remedying the degraded state of fish habitats. There is a clear disconnect between the agents which are framed as causal agents of the degradation, and the actors which are framed and named as being key to delivering the solution. The NSW DPI is not seeking to remunerate recreational fishers for their involvement in participatory stewardship activities, and it is worth noting the time and resource commitment being sought from recreational fishers and fishing groups is not insignificant.

Conclusion

Although an interdisciplinary body of scholarship has explored the neoliberalisation of nature (Bridge, 2004, Mansfield, 2004), whereby environmental problems are solved through market mechanisms and public-private partnerships (Ciplet and Roberts, 2017), the associated rescaling of environmental responsibility to the individual has received less attention. This research highlights the discursive strategies used to mobilise stakeholders to become involved in stewardship activities. As a subset of environmental governance, fisheries management provides an empirical site through which to study these issues. Further, although increasing academic attention is being paid to the role recreational fishers may play in delivering on solutions to the degradation of fish habitats, little has considered the discursive strategies used by policymakers to responsabilise recreational fishers.

Future research opportunities may consider whether the identified dissonance in the selected corpus of texts extends to other artifacts which are produced by the NSW DPI. Further, conducting semi-

structured interviews with recreational fishers would be useful to gain a deeper understanding of how they respond to the responsabilisation agenda. Future research opportunities also lie in testing whether the discursive strategies utilised by the NSW DPI are deployed by state actors in other national and international jurisdictions. This research is potentially relevant to all neoliberal states, and while the content of responsabilisation may vary, it is likely to manifest itself across a range of public policy initiatives, including those within the environmental governance, health and education spaces.

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