

The state and its agencies in coastal resources management: The political ecology of fisheries management in Pattani, southern Thailand

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Various stakeholders contribute to the current state of resource management in the inshore fisheries of Pattani, southern Thailand. Taking the state, empowered by national legislation, as the main agent of enforcement, this paper uses an actor-oriented approach derived from political ecology to evaluate how key agents in state agencies at provincial and district levels translate Thai political and legal systems at the local level; more specifically, how cross-scalar institutional linkages and translations affect coastal resources management and the access of village-based, small-scale fishermen to coastal resources. **The paper shows that trans-scalar interpretations have created a space of contestation and negotiation in resource governance at the local level that reveals intrastate tensions. Based on extensive fieldwork, the paper demonstrates that access to environmental resources at the local level is highly influenced or regulated by the unequal power relations between different actors at various levels.**

Keywords: political ecology, southern Thailand, inshore fisheries, coastal resources management

Political ecology: a tool for understanding the varied roles of state as an actor?

Due to its 'unique remit to act in the "national interest" ' (Bryant & Bailey, 1997: 48) or for the 'common good', the state has been regarded as the 'steward' of the environment. At the same time, the state is also an important actor in the often contradictory role of promoting 'development' and capital accumulation in line with its own political and strategic interests (Bryant & Bailey, 1997: 188).

Power relations between different actors are at the heart of the political ecology framework. Assessing the unequal power relations between actors provides a way to explain the uneven distribution of access to environmental resources. Power is conceptualized by differential ability to control access to valued environmental resources, the main objective of which is control and/or access to the economic benefits ensuing from resource exploitation (Bryant, 1997: 11; see also Peluso, 1992; Dauvergne, 1994; MacAndrews, 1994; Bryant, 1996). Adopting this perspective, Le Billion (2001: 567) illustrated how tight economic and political control of a dominant resource sector by a ruling elite leaves little scope for accumulating wealth and status outside of state patronage.

Instead of elites, this paper focuses on the contestation over control of access to local fishery resources between local state agencies and officials, fishermen and grassroots leaders at the village level in coastal Pattani Province in southern Thailand. Of the five groups of actors categorized by Bryant and Bailey (1997) – states, multilateral institutions, businesses, environmental nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots actors – the paper concentrates on local state agencies and grassroots leaders, actors whose influence is the most relevant at the village level. The state (and its agencies) derives power mainly through a process of legitimation that empowers it to act in the 'national' interest and play a pivotal role in attempts to resolve problems at local,

regional, national (and even global) scales.² Small-scale fishermen, most often represented by grassroot leaders, stake and position their claims to coastal resources as that of their rights to traditional livelihoods and food security.³

However, different interests maintained by state actors also translate into differing interpretations and actions within each group or agency, and at various levels. Hence, the categorization of stakeholders into predetermined groups can be problematic in practice, as interests are fixed, and may well vary, between scales. Furthermore, the mismatch of government planning and implementation at the national, provincial and local levels illustrates the tensions between and within agencies, and the information gap is magnified by the fluid interactions across these conceived scales.

Political ecology provides the necessary basic framework for thinking about the conflicts and struggles engendered by the varied forms of control over the access to natural resources. The attention that this approach affords to the power relations inherent in defining, controlling and managing nature allows us to be sensitive to the expanded repertoire of forms of political practice (Peluso & Watts, 2001). In Southeast Asia, for example, scholars such as Peluso (1992) and Bryant (1996) have used a political ecology framework to examine how forest politics in Indonesia and Burma respectively have been shaped by various actors. However, to date, most research examining access to natural resources has tended to be land-centred. Work on mainland Southeast Asian fishing communities includes that of anthropologists such as Firth (1946), Burr (1972), Said (1993) and Ruohomäki (1999), among others. The most notable sea-based studies on southern Thailand's predominantly Malay-Muslim fishing communities are those by Fraser (1960; 1966), which have been restudied by Provencher (Provencher & Madmarn, 1994 provides a preliminary report).

This paper seeks to contribute to this literature by assessing the functions and contribution of state agencies to the current state of coastal resources management in this area. Using an actor-oriented approach derived from work in political ecology, the paper highlights the gaps and/or linkages in national and provincial environmental policy formulation and implementation as manifest in coastal resources management at the village level. Deviations in the enforcement of the state's national plans, such as the consecutive five-year National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDPs), and laws (the 'public scripts') relating to local coastal resource access in Pattani waters are illustrated through various examples at the provincial and village level.

Background to the study

According to political ecology theory, the state (national agencies), as the 'steward' of the 'common resources', bears the responsibility for regulating resource access. However, this broad remit, when accompanied by administrative inefficiency, unequal power relations between the agencies at various levels (national, provincial and local) and the variable willingness of citizens to participate in the management of resources, empowers local state agencies and individual officials to interpret policies and regulations according to their own interests. The limitations of the political ecology framework in its current formulation can thus be illustrated by close empirical documentation of this.

Research sites and methodology

This paper draws on field research conducted between January 2002 and December 2005 that formed part of my doctoral submission on the political ecology of coastal

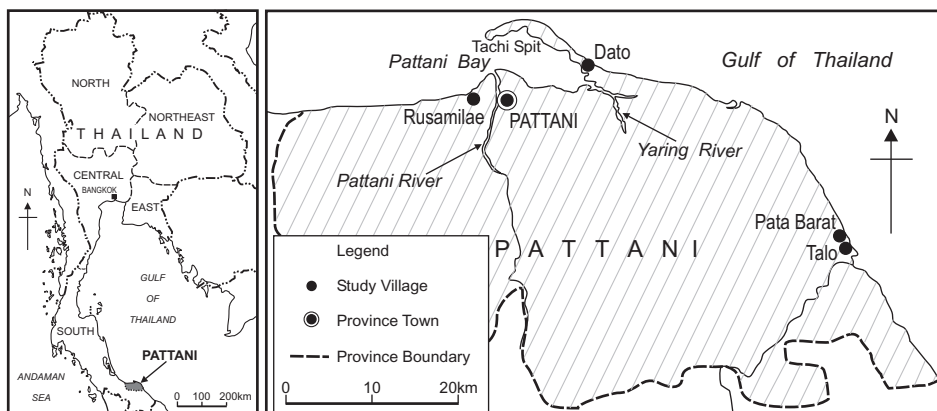


Figure 1. The locations of the four study villages (or 'ban') – Rusamilae, Dato, Pata Barat and Talo – in Pattani Province, southern Thailand.

resources management in fishing villages in southern Thailand (Tan, 2006). This focused primarily on four main coastal villages (or *ban*) in Pattani Province bordering the Gulf of Thailand – Ban Rusamilae, Ban Dato, Ban Pata Barat and Ban Talo (Figure 1)⁴ – and included two supplementary fishing villages in the neighbouring provinces of Nakorn Sri Thammarat and Songkhla. Field-based investigation involved village stays (for periods of two weeks to two months), in-depth interviews, participant observation (including eight day and three night fishing trips with small-scale and commercial fishermen), as well as site observation and informal focus group discussions with fishermen. Of 243 respondents interviewed in the fishery sector (in Thai, Pattani Malay, Mandarin, Teochew and English), 41 main informants⁵ were selected. Another 26 interviews were conducted with academics and local NGO leaders in southern Thailand and in Bangkok. (As southern Thailand remains an area where tensions and violence persist due to the presence of a Buddhist civil-state presence, I have omitted the names of informants to protect their privacy, but have in some cases included the titles 'Cik/Ba' for Malay-Muslim individuals and 'Khun/Mr/Ms' for Thai-Buddhist individuals.)

In order to understand the politics between state and local village and NGO actors, as well as within the state agencies and NGOs, information was also sought from individuals in the Department of Fisheries in Pattani Province and local community-based groups, including the regional coalition the Federation of Small-scale Fisherfolk from Southern Thailand. Politics within the practices and logics of national and supra-national organizations are as crucial as the discourses and practices activated in local resistance to the official practices (Frank *et al.*, 2000). Moreover, 'official' models of environment and development, as reflected in formal documentation, differ significantly from the 'vernacular' ones held and utilized by officials in daily practice, particularly at the local level. These differences and their implications for environmental politics can be revealed only by intensive and rigorous field-based research (Dove & Kammen, 2001).

The importance of fisheries in southern Thailand

In addition to contributing to the national income and foreign exchange earnings of Thailand, the fishing industry provides a major source of inexpensive protein for Thai people as well as employment in the 23 coastal provinces. Latest figures available

indicate that, in 2000, the Thai fisheries sector accounted for 2.5 and 27.6 per cent of national and agricultural gross domestic product respectively (Somying, 2002: 357).

Pattani is the main fish landing port in southern Thailand⁶ and serves as a node of collection for products exported to the major markets of Bangkok, Malaysia and Singapore. Pattani Bay is a particularly important site for small-scale fishermen because of the natural shelter against the strong winds during the northeast monsoon afforded by the Tachi Spit (Laem Tachi) and because the bay is a spawning ground for the various species of marine life harvested by fishing communities all along the coast.

Thailand's marine fishery is characterized by the coexistence of small-scale with large-scale commercial fisheries.⁷ According to the *Marine Fishery Census* (NSO, 1995), while the southern region had the highest number of fishery establishments in the whole country, only 1599 of the region's 16 846 establishments were equipped with inboard-powered boats (and officially classified as 'commercial'); the remaining 90 per cent of establishments comprised small-scale operators.⁸ Given the importance of the fishing industry, the number of small-scale livelihoods involved and the consequent pressure put on coastal resources, access to and control of coastal resources have inevitably become sites of contestation and growing tension.

Unequal power relations at the national and provincial levels

Numerous NESDPs have aimed to protect and improve Thailand's environmental management and resources. Both the most recent Eighth Plan (1997–2001) and Ninth Plan (2002–06) had emphasized the importance of sustainable development and of taking a 'bottom-up' approach to include popular participation in the formulation of policies. The Ninth Plan also included a separate major document outlining 'The Policy and Prospective Plan for Enhancement and Conservation on National Environmental Quality for 1997–2016', which called for a 'systematic decentralization of power and authority from central offices to regional offices'. Thus, national policies and plans are initially formulated by the central administration (sectoral ministries and specialist departments) in Bangkok and then handed over to the provincial, district and village administrations for implementation (see Ayut *et al.*, 2001).

As a result, concurrent development plans are formulated and administered by various agencies at different levels. Since 1997, this situation has been complicated by the establishment of the elected member 'local government organisations' – the (sub-district) Tambon Administrative Organisation (TAO) and Provincial Administrative Organisation (PAO) – that operate independently of sectoral ministries. Both organisations were created as part of the decentralization initiatives introduced 10 years ago to manage development and tax revenues in each province, focussing in particular on building projects such as roads, schools and other amenities. Under proposed redrafted fishery laws, taxation and management matters for the first 3 nm in Thai waters (previously under the jurisdiction of the provincial governor or CEO) are to come under the TAO, while the next 6 nm will be under the PAO, effectively vesting the power of 'resource ownerships' in these two local administrations.⁹ However, these devolutions have created more confusion. As Mr M.S., an official in the Industrial Ministry provincial office (Pattani town, 17 May 2003), made clear:

I am not happy with the power of the PAO, as they are uncooperative and unwilling to share information on the plans and budget, especially when it comes to industrial development. Yet they do not have real power, nor any actual enforcement power, but only electoral power.

This view was echoed by an entry-level civil servant in the same provincial office (Industrial Ministry, Pattani town, 9 June 2003):

First, the PAO and TAO interfere with my work, now I have to report to the CEO [provincial governor] too. At the same time, I have to write reports to the officers in the Fishery Department in Pattani and to the senior officers in (the Fishery Department in) Bangkok. Who exactly am I working for? (sighs)

Responsibilities for natural resources management, including fisheries, reside primarily with sectoral ministries. The three main ministries charged with provincial fisheries management in Pattani are the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives' Department of Fisheries (DOF) provincial and district offices, the Ministry of Interior's provincial governor (or CEO) and the Ministry of Natural Resources' Department of Coastal and Marine Resources provincial and district offices. At the village level, state agency representatives involved in coastal management enforcement issues include officers of the Royal Marine Police, Royal Navy, Marine Resources Development Centre for Southern Thailand and TAO, as well as the government-appointed resident village headmen. Suffice it to say, the poor definition and overlap in the reporting hierarchy had produced obstacles to the efficient operation of departments at the provincial and district levels, and low-level civil servants were highly taxed by sometimes having to write four different reports on each project for the various agencies and managers.

As so many agencies are concurrently authorized to enforce various environmental laws, the problems arising are further compounded whenever clear boundaries for jurisdiction were not agreed upon before acts were passed. As a result, officials are left unsure of their authority and duties, and the quality of communication and coordination among agencies in Thailand is compromised (Siam Society, 1989: 465). The corresponding lack of clarity in people's perceptions was evident in all the study villages: when asked which authority was in charge of fishing and coastal resources, replies ranged from 'TAO', 'DOF', 'Navy' and '*phuyaiban*' (village headman) to 'not sure'. This messy situation empowers local officials to deviate from the official script and operate according to their own interests, presenting a challenge to, albeit more powerful, higher-up provincial and national officials. Fishing villagers, in turn driven by their own interests, willingly participated in these 'challenges' of local officials. Clearly, this state of affairs undermines the viability of categorizing stakeholders according to the 'top-down' hierarchy posited in current versions of the political ecology approach.

According to Rigg (1997: 90–91), there is little integration of work between various sectoral ministries in Thailand, which not only perpetuates confusion and further empowers local officials, but also presents additional obstacles to the management of resources and enforcement of rules and regulations. This was verified during fieldwork in relation to the problems of licensing boats with rights to fish in Pattani waters. According to an officer in charge of permit registration in the Pattani Harbour Office (Pattani town, 9 August 2003), all fishing boats are required to possess two government documents: a fishing license from the DOF District Office and a navigation certificate from the Harbour Department at the boat owner's home province. With these two permits, a boat is free to enter any Thai fishing area, which means that large commercial vessels can move in and out of any provincial fishing areas without having to be registered with (or accountable to) the local DOF. This free-for-all entry into Pattani resource grounds threatens the livelihoods of local fishermen, both small-scale and commercial, as ostensible control of fishing boats through licensing is impossible.

According to the same Pattani Harbour officer, the problem of inter-province encroachment is severe in the commercial sector:

Most of the commercial fishing boats come from Rayong, Petchuburi, Samut Sakhon, Prachuab Khirikhan and Surat Thani. These boats are not registered in Pattani and only have to pay a once a year tax for extension of license. The fees are not fixed as they depend upon year, month and boat size. In addition, the owners can choose to pay in their home provinces.

Fishing gear also needs to be registered in either the home or working province and fees paid accordingly. For example, trawler owners, who typically use approximately 1000–1200 m of trawl nets per boat, would have to pay THB 5000–6000 – charged at THB 5 per metre (USD 1 = THB 32). Yet, Ms M., a DOF official who deals with the registration of fishing gear (Pattani town, 2 May 2003), notes:

No fisherman has paid more than THB 3600 in gear registration. The most I have collected is THB 3550 from a commercial fisher based in Pattani.

Furthermore, most of her records showed only one type of gear registered per fisherman, despite research surveys confirming that many fishermen utilize more than one gear-type. Such inaccurate data further hampers effective management of coastal resources as gear restrictions become difficult to enforce. Without a clear indication of the number and type of fishing gears working in the area, it is difficult to plan, calculate and maintain a sustainable fish stock for long-term fishing.

The fact that different agencies manage different phases of the formulation and implementation of policies, as well as different components of the marine and coastal environment, further signposts the possible difficulties in resource management in Thailand (Johnson, 1998; Ayut *et al.*, 2001). At the national level, the 1947 Fisheries Act (amended in 1953, 1985, 2002 and pending) and other ministerial decrees regulate fishery activities in the village; in practice, enforcement is led by the DOF's Provincial Fishery Officer (whose regulatory power is specified under Section 32 of the Fisheries Act) based in Pattani town. The 1994 Royal Decree on Administration, in combination with the 1992 Administration Act, sets out the authority of the Provincial Fishery Officer (one in each province) and District Fishery Officers (at least two permanent officers in each district). This policy of decentralization and popular participation was introduced in the Fifth Plan (1981–86) and extended in the subsequent five-year plan with the inclusion of 'local government organizations' at the village and subdistrict (*tambon*) levels in the development process (Rigg, 1991).

Although this decentralization was intended to enhance the sustainability of fisheries in Thailand, it has had contradictory outcomes as the quality of the enforcement depends on the capability and willingness of local officials. Many scholars (e.g. Rigg, 1997; Udom, 1998; Johnson, 1998; Awaie & McGregor, 1998) have correlated the inadequacy of law enforcement in coastal resources management with a lack of political will and financial and manpower resources, as well as with inadequate instruments, standard operating procedures and communications between agencies. These very same deficiencies empower local officials to interpret regulations with relative freedom, and to enforce them according to their personal interests and gains.

Recognizing the need to reassess the effectiveness of the laws under the Fisheries Act and improve the state of Thailand's environment and coastal and marine resources, the central government, in 2002, redrafted the act to include six new principles (Somying, 2002). Significantly, it is proposed that the inshore zone reserved for small-scale fishers is extended from the current 3 km to 3 nm (or approximately 5.55 km). While a further

round of rulings is in the pipeline, the proposals have yet to be approved by parliament (DOF official, Pattani town, March 2005). Many commercial and small-scale fishermen who knew about these pending changes indicated that they had been allowed no involvement in the formulation of the new regulations; instead, the main local participants consulted were DOF officers and academics from Prince of Songkhla University (PSU), Pattani campus.

Dr Sukree Hajisamae, (Department of Fishery Biology, PSU, Pattani town, 25 February 2004) who was among those seconded to reformulate the provincial fishery laws, identified several shortcomings in the yet-to-be-ratified rulings. According to him, despite the proposed new zoning laws, the accompanying maps did not reflect the changes:

There are no clear definitions of Pattani provincial waters. A new map indicating the zones is necessary to ensure the new zoning laws are effective. The lack of a map would further complicate the enforcement process, especially the placement of boundary markers for the various zones. Imagine [that] local fishermen could not patrol and guard the area that is rightfully theirs, because the commercial fishers could argue that they are in another province's waters.

Furthermore, because the redrafting of new laws and zonings was delegated to individual provinces, different provinces have formulated different laws. Worse still, the proposed new zoning regulations do not fit with the geological conditions and reality of certain areas. Pattani Bay, which is utilized intensively by small-scale fishermen, is more than 3 nm wide, and therefore will still be considered part of the commercial fishery zone. As such, the new rulings do little to control encroachment by commercial fishers into the small-scale fishers' inshore zones. In Ban Pata Barat, for instance, small-scale fishermen who often travel beyond 7 nm given the types of fishing gear they possess – simple line and hooks, and demersal traps placed on the seabed – will be placed in the commercial zone by the proposed new ruling. As commercial fishers also utilize demersal traps, local fishermen foresaw more conflicts in the future in terms of rights-based fishery. One hook-and-line fisherman (Ban Pata Barat, 6 March 2004) cynically noted:

New rulings are supposed to protect us, the small-scale fishermen. However, the Thai government is so good it does exactly the opposite. Who knows, tomorrow our dear ministers might carelessly redraw the maps and boundaries of southern provinces as part of Malaysia!

The DOF, one of the main bodies responsible for redrafting the Fisheries Act and a subsidiary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, is theoretically the main state agency involved in fishery resources management. As seen in Figure 2, the Pattani Provincial Fishery Office consists of a main administrative section, two specialized units and seven district offices. According to their internal annual report (Pattani Provincial Fishery Office, 2000), the fishery resources preservation unit is responsible for the

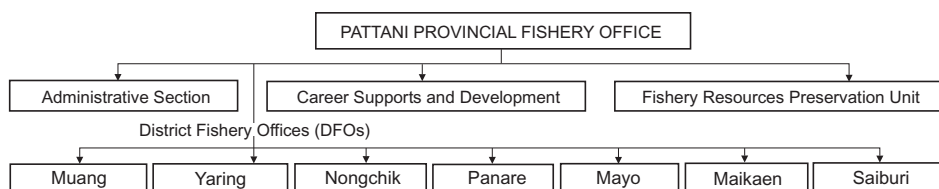


Figure 2. *Pattani Provincial Fishery Office structure.*

Source: Pattani Provincial Fishery Office (2000).

control of fishery resources at the local level and the main duties of each of the seven district offices are to control access to coastal resources and enforce the constitutional fishery laws that bind the citizens of Thailand. The overlap and duplication of responsibilities between respective district offices, including disseminating information and knowledge of fishery, promoting awareness of resource preservation and the need to maintain valid documents, and, most pertinent, collecting taxes and fees, provide a space for deviating from laws and regulations.

The village level: national agencies, local enforcement and deviations from policies

Despite there being at least two permanent officials in each DOF District Office, the fishermen in the study villages (in Muang, Yaring and Saiburi districts) hardly came across them. Notwithstanding decentralization, the officials in charge of enforcement were based in Muang District, some 60 km away from the study communities in Ban Pata Barat and Ban Talo in Saiburi District. The only time the officials' presence was noticed was during their sporadic raids, which had resulted in only six arrests in 2000 (Pattani Provincial Fishery Office, 2000). These DOF officials were empowered to act at the local level by the letter of national legislations and by being in possession of the knowledge and technology provided to them by provincial and national agencies.

Interviews with the headman of Ban Rusamilae suggested that the role of the Pattani DOF was perceived as facilitating improvements, such as the provision of new fishing nets or traps for fishermen. However, his own helplessness and frustration in not being able to resolve conflicts in favour of protecting the livelihoods of small-scale fishermen because there was little enforcement of the 3 km zoning regulation had convinced him of corruption among DOF officials. In interviews with DOF officials, the problems of encroachment in Pattani inshore waters were acknowledged; but not much could be done as there was insufficient budgetary outlay to remunerate officials for overtime work and the culprits operated mostly at night. Moreover, with only two boats assigned to the entire province, it was impossible for them to patrol the 116.4-km coastline.

The disappointing results from this dependence on provincial and district authority to enforce coastal resource access had firmly cemented a popular belief that all DOF officials were corrupt and also reinforced negative views of the central government. Most local fishermen, both small-scale and commercial, had a deep distrust of the authorities in general, which was not just a product of the historical past but was also rooted in their everyday experience.¹⁰ For example, Ba-D, a fisherman from Ban Dato (Tachi Spit, 11 March 2004), indicated the corruption rampant in the traffic violation raids in Pattani town conducted daily in order to generate bribes, and in the 'difficulties' posed by officials in simple procedures to obtain a government document. Small-scale fishermen also believed that DOF officials were in cahoots with commercial fishermen, who seemed forewarned of any raids. Many had witnessed commercial fishermen operating push-nets¹¹ (which had been officially banned by the provincial governor since 1997) bribing DOF officials with 'taxes' before they departed on night fishing trips. Indeed, on my own night trips with a small-scale fisherman, DOF boats were seen waiting at the channel near the mouth of the Pattani River to collect 'taxes' from the commercial push-net boats heading out to sea. According to another small-scale fisherman (Ba-W, Pattani Bay, 16 August 2003), the pay-outs varied from THB 100 to 500 nightly depending on the size of the boat.

Fisherman Ba-O (Ban Rusamilae, 14 July 2003), preferred that destructive and illegal commercial push-net operations be stopped altogether, but believed that it was

practically impossible because of the bribes received by DOF officers and marine policemen. He also believed that 'the government' was not doing anything because these big commercial fishermen paid annual taxes, unlike the small-scale fishermen with far smaller incomes. The belief that *all* officials are corrupt is entrenched in people's minds. Ba-O (Ban Rusamilae, 19 July 2003) summed up:

There is no one that I can ask for help in the village, or in Thailand, as no one is honest and not corrupted. This is *rabob muang thai* – the Thai 'model' or Thai 'way'.

Interestingly, commercial fishermen in Ban Talo had similar impressions of the DOF, because the state has the ability and authority to define 'the problem' (Forsyth, 2003) without regard to any other actors, be they the local fishermen or commercial operators from other provinces. In other words, local commercial fishermen felt that they could always be defined as being 'part of the problem' and arrested by the DOF, even when utilizing trawling nets in the legally permitted zone outside the 3-km inshore fisheries zone. In such instances, arresting officials also possess the authority to propose 'the solution'. As one commercial fisherman (Khun J, Ban Talo, 21 February 2004) put it:

When I am arrested, I will pay the DOF to avoid the whole procedure of going to court. . . . usually THB 3000–5000, six bottles of beer and two cartons of Marlboro cigarettes. Instead of going through the whole procedure, I just give the officials the things they want and they will let me go.

In other narrated incidents, commercial fishermen arrested for using the 'wrong' or banned equipment and fined THB 20 000 simply returned to their trade with the same gear. This use of the 'public script' (laws) to support 'private practices' (corruption) uncovers the space where these realms intersect. This intersecting space continues to exist not only because of the lack of knowledge and publicity about it, but also because it is a 'mutually beneficial' situation for both fishermen, whose access to resource grounds is facilitated, as well as for officials, who benefit financially. Hence, difficulties in enforcing laws intensify.

Another commercial fisherman (Khun L, Ban Talo, 16 March 2004), who revealed that Marine Police from the neighbouring Songkhla Province were active in Saiburi District waters, had himself been arrested twice by them in 2004 for not having permits for his echo sound and star tracking equipment (respectively used to detect fish schools and to determine and plan boat directions) that he was using. The penalty included paying THB 1000 to redeem each instrument. When I asked why he did not obtain the proper licenses, he responded: 'It is extremely expensive and approximately THB 100 000 for all the equipment I own. It is just easier to pay the fines'. This example also demonstrates the confusion that exists even among provincial and interdepartmental government officials about just who is empowered to enforce laws. It seems that just as commercial fishermen feel able to enter the waters of any province to fish, so too do enforcement officials feel able to collect payment where they can.

In many cases, village headmen, as part of their official responsibilities within the Thai governmental framework, had sought to resolve fishery conflicts. In the four study villages, their roles were usually those of administrators and mediators: in a conflict between outside commercial fishermen and local fishermen, a headman would demand compensation from the commercial fishermen, and if this was not forthcoming, bring the case to court on behalf of his constituents. In Ban Rusamilae, the headman's best efforts to resolve conflicts between villagers and commercial fishermen and demand compensation if stationary nets were destroyed had produced few successes as the local

resource ground, Pattani Bay, serves as a traffic lane for commercial boats to unload/load at the port. Without the support and reinforcement of DOF officers, the village headman's authority could achieve very little as most of these commercial boats were from other provinces. This had led to the Ban Rusamilae headman being seen as ineffective and 'on the government side' in fishery matters. Instead, villagers sought the help of former fisherman Muhama Sukree Masaning, leader of the Federation of Small-Scale Fisherfolk from Southern Thailand (formed in 1993) to mobilize efforts in dealing with fishery conflict issues. The entry of nonstate grassroots actors, such as Muhama Sukree and academics at PSU in Pattani spurred the implementation in 2002 of a Pilot Project for Management and Rehabilitation of Coastal Resources in Pattani, based in PSU. Sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and managed by the Ban Rusamilae headman and representatives from the Federation of Small-Scale Fisherfolk, this envisages putting in place a compensation scheme for the gradual replacement of destructive push-nets used by local small-scale and commercial fishermen alike.¹²

In Ban Pata Barat and Ban Dato, the headmen had been more successful in convincing commercial fishermen to stay out of the small-scale fisheries, especially the stationary net areas, because these operators were also local residents who felt a social responsibility and obligation towards others in their home communities. Thus, in these two study villages, the headmen could exert greater control over the encroaching activity of commercial fishermen.

Negative perceptions of officialdom and red tape, including recourse to legal options for redress, because of the inconvenience entailed or just unwillingness to have contact with government officials, has made corruption a fact. In a village setting, the headman, the main bridge between the government and villagers, is well placed to play an important role in enforcing improved coastal resource access given his proximity to the actual resource grounds and his position in the local sociopolitical structure. Yet the headmen in the study villages had little or no actual power in effecting improvements in coastal resources management. Despite being the main state agents onsite at the village level, they are without support from the government and actual empowerment. As such, the impact of coastal resources management by state agents in safeguarding the daily fishing routines of villagers has been all but nonexistent. Instead, it is newer actors including local NGOs such as the Federation of Small-scale Fisherfolk and academics from PSU who have been more successful in helping small-scale fishermen in Pattani to resolve their resource conflicts.¹³

Conclusion

This paper has outlined how multiscalar linkages and multiple actors (within specific localities) influence the management of coastal resources in Pattani Province, southern Thailand. Governmental officials, village headmen, local academics and NGO leaders coexist as stakeholders in management of coastal resources at the village level. The Thai state emerges as a complex and contradictory actor. In practice, state agencies at the national, provincial and local levels translate policies and regulations according to divergent interests. Yet, while the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives' support for the Pilot Project indicated an encouraging turn towards long-term planning for sustainable resource management, local DOF officials continue to undermine the scheme to obtain personal benefit. The unequal power relations between the national, provincial and local officials, even within the same state agency, are exacerbated by the lack of

enforcement, governance and coordination. Although, in theory, the national and provincial DOF officials are more powerful than local officials, the lack of, or weak, mechanism for enforcement of regulations by these national and provincial agencies has enabled local enforcement officials to extract bribes according to their personal interest.

This situation also enables considerable variation in interpreting fishing laws at the local level. As a result, when deviating translations transcend their 'fixed' scale, the space for variation empowers local officials to interpret (published) regulations to suit themselves. The use of the 'public script' (laws) to support the 'private practices' by local government officials has become a 'mutually beneficial' situation for both the fishermen and officials: deviating 'private practices' were only possible because of the power entrusted to officials and the willing participation and collaboration of fishermen wanting to avoid tortuous dealings with the state bureaucracy. This nexus is not only the site of 'collaboration' between the local state officials and fishermen, but it also yields spaces of 'contestation' for policy interpretation between the state agencies.

The role of the state as a 'steward', legitimized by constitutions, laws and regulations can only be effective if it coincides with government officials' willingness to enforce such public scripts and to overcome the challenges of bribery and corruption and of harmonizing coastal zoning and other regulations between different agencies (across boundaries and scales). Other research on marine resources in Southeast Asia (Hviding & Baines, 1996; Sverdrup-Jensen & Raakjær, 1999; Wantana *et al.*, 2003) has similarly highlighted how cross-scalar institutional linkages and differences of interpretations affect the capabilities of the local resource owners to effectively manage their resources. Only through studying political relations between different actors at various levels can the process of politicization of the environment be better clarified and more appropriate management policies formulated.

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Endnotes

- 1 Southern Thailand in this paper refers mainly to the three southernmost Malay-Muslim dominated provinces of (Buddhist) Thailand, namely, Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani.
- 2 According to Agnew (2002: 138–40), geographical scale is often conceptualized in terms that are either fixed or positing the emerging dominance of one level over others in political organization and behaviour. In particular, the national and global have achieved a privileged status as the geographical scales at which politics is said to be determined. Yet, it is the intersection of processes across scales rather than singular dominance of one particular scale (e.g. global networks versus states or the local) that is at work. Thus, although it might be provisionally useful to separate scales analytically, it is important to note that they all overlap and ultimately manifest their effects at the 'local' scale. The interplay between different actor groups is not just cross-scalar and inter-group, and therefore not easily classified into binary or triangular models, but also requires the theorization of a dynamic, fluid interaction between the different interest profiles within these groups from various scales.
- 3 Historically, Malay customary law practices (*adat Melayu*) played a determining role in who owns what kinds of resources among members of the Malay fishing communities in this

region. However, these were superseded by the modernizations to the Thai state particularly in and from the early twentieth century (Che Man, 1990: 256).

- 4 Ban Rusamilae, situated in Tambon (subdistrict) Rusamilae in Muang District, is a 99 per cent Malay-Muslim village; all fishermen are small-scale, operating either non-motorized or outboard-powered boats. Ban Dato, in Tambon Laem Pho in Yaring District, is an entirely Malay-Muslim village; all fishermen are small-scale. Ban Pata Barat, in Tambon Pase Jawa in Saiburi District, located about 60 km south of Pattani town, is 99 per cent Malay-Muslim (with three Thai-Buddhist families) and the fishermen are mostly small-scale. The main economic catches are demersal (bottom-dwelling) species such as garoupas and black pomfrets. By contrast, neighbouring Ban Talo is an entirely Thai-Buddhist village in which all 16 families involved in fishing are commercial operators utilizing mainly anchovy nets.
- 5 The 41 main informants (34 Malay-Muslim; the rest Thai-Buddhist) comprised 29 men and 12 women, of whom 24 were small-scale and 7 were commercial local fishermen, 6 were dealers and 4 were government officers.
- 6 The 14 southern coastal provinces are, in the Gulf of Thailand, Chumphon, Nakorn Sri Thammarat, Phattalung, Songkhla, Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, and in the Andaman Sea, Ranong, Surat Thani, Phangnga, Phuket, Krabi, Trang and Satun.
- 7 The dualistic composition of the fisheries sector is quite evident in the Pattani Bay area. On the one hand are the commercial fishers, officially defined as boats of more than 12 metres length, or more than 10 gross tons (some of which are refrigerated), that use modern fishing gear such as purse seines, otter board trawls and large trawl cast nets, and that operate offshore for several days before typically landing at large ports. On the other are small-scale fishermen operating outboard-powered traditional long-tail boats, either rear cut or kolek (sea-fishing canoes), or non-motorized boats of less than 12 m length, and using gill nets, simple lines and hooks, crab traps and rattan fish traps. There is also an ethnic divide: the commercial sector is dominated by Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Muslims, while the small-scale fishermen are mostly Malay-Muslims. However, it should be noted that only a very small percentage of the ethnic Thai-Buddhist commercial fishers operating in Pattani waters are local; most are from other provinces, such as Rayong and Samut Sakhon.
- 8 'Fishery establishments' includes all operations in the fishery sector categorized as households without boats, and those with non-powered boats, outboard-powered (longtail) boats and inboard-powered boats, ranging from less than 5 to 100 gross tons and over. For more details see the Thai National Statistical Office online data pages at <http://web.nso.go.th/eng/stat/fish38/fisht3.htm> and <http://web.nso.go.th/eng/stat/subject/toc2.xls> (tables 2.4–2.8).
- 9 While the elected PAO and TAO are significant actors in provincial political machinery, their roles are not discussed in any detail here as neither had any administrative or enforcement power in coastal resources management issues at the time of the research.
- 10 Of the 116 respondents, 98 believed that extensive corruption and bribery practices were prevalent among rank and file officials (as I had to establish trust before posing such a sensitive question, only 116 out of the 243 respondents were asked; DOF officials and three village headmen were excluded given their possible role in these activities).
- 11 Push-nets, literally pushed along the seabed, their small-size mesh scooping up even juvenile fish, sea grasses and so on, are not just highly destructive of the coastal habitat, but also damage the gears of others, especially the stationary nets left overnight by small-scale fishermen. This is why they usually operate at night to avoid detection.
- 12 Unfortunately, the project has been in suspension since 2004 after some commercial operators refused to convert their gears when the PAO was unable to obtain sufficient funds for the THB 2 million compensation demanded for each boat (Tan-Mullins, 2005).
- 13 For example, the PSU academics and the Federation of Small-Scale Fisherfolk launched a programme for rehabilitating a coastal environment (Bang Tawa village) in Pattani Province through mangrove replanting and fish larvae releasing activities on 12 October 2003.

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