

Why did we undertake this study?

Adaptive management is considered a valuable approach for managing complex and uncertain social-ecological systems. However, many obstacles hamper its implementation. Law is often seen as a barrier to adaptive management practice, but there is no synthesis of the legal constraints or how to overcome them.

How was it done?

We conducted a systematic literature review to examine the relationship between adaptive management and law. The literature sample (80 publications) was classified according to thematic categories (e.g. geographic context and main environmental concern). Through thematic coding, passages of text from publications were linked by common themes and ideas.

What did we find?

Scholarship addressing adaptive management and law has grown over recent years.

We found:

- Most literature (64%) had the United States as the geographical focus.
- Water management and biodiversity have received more attention than other fields of research, such as coastal management and fisheries.
- Primary data collection (e.g. interviews and surveys) is rarely undertaken (only 14% of literature) in studies examining the relationship between adaptive management and law.

Stationarity, certainty and finality are values adopted in law that hinder flexibility. Increasing legal flexibility has been suggested to allow for adaptive management.

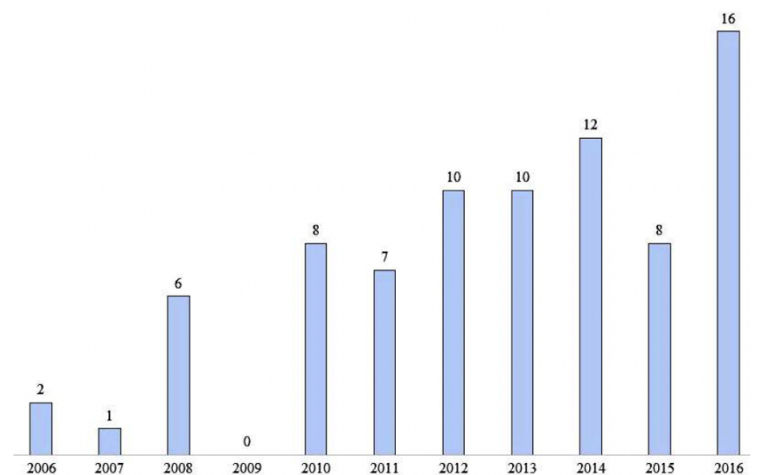


Figure 1: Number of articles by publication date.

What are the implications?

Overall, coupling adaptive management and law depends on balancing legal certainty and legal flexibility. Further research is needed to investigate this interplay, particularly in jurisdictions outside the United States. Research in developing countries and comparative studies could provide additional insight and improve knowledge of the role of law in adaptive management practice.

Want more information?

The full paper is available from: <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-10060-230223>

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Coastal Governance: Embracing Vulnerability and Change

