

CONSIDERING ONE'S OPTIONS WHEN THE FISH LEAVE

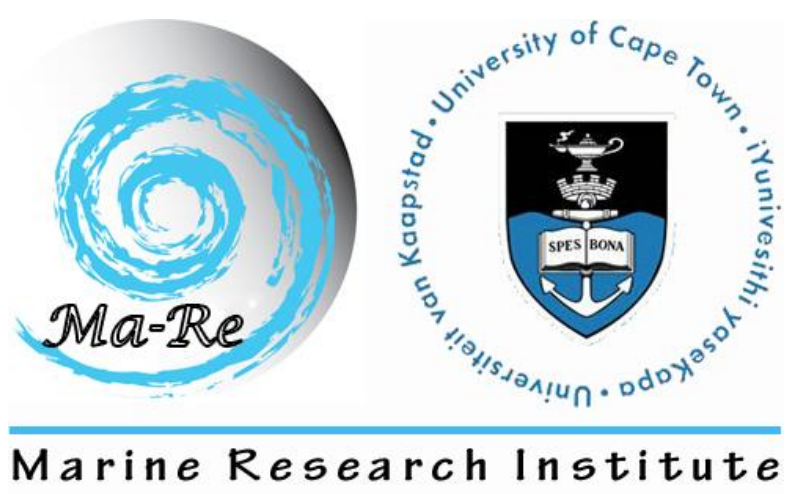
A case study of the commercial handline fishery of South Africa's southern Cape coast

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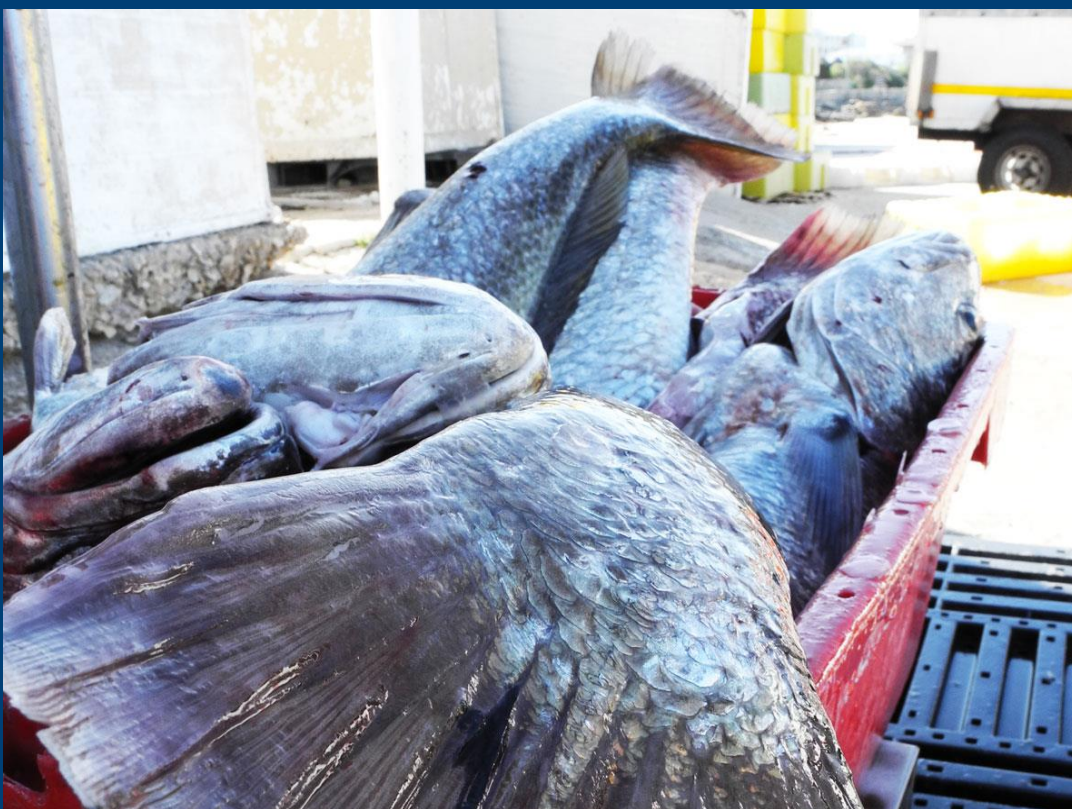
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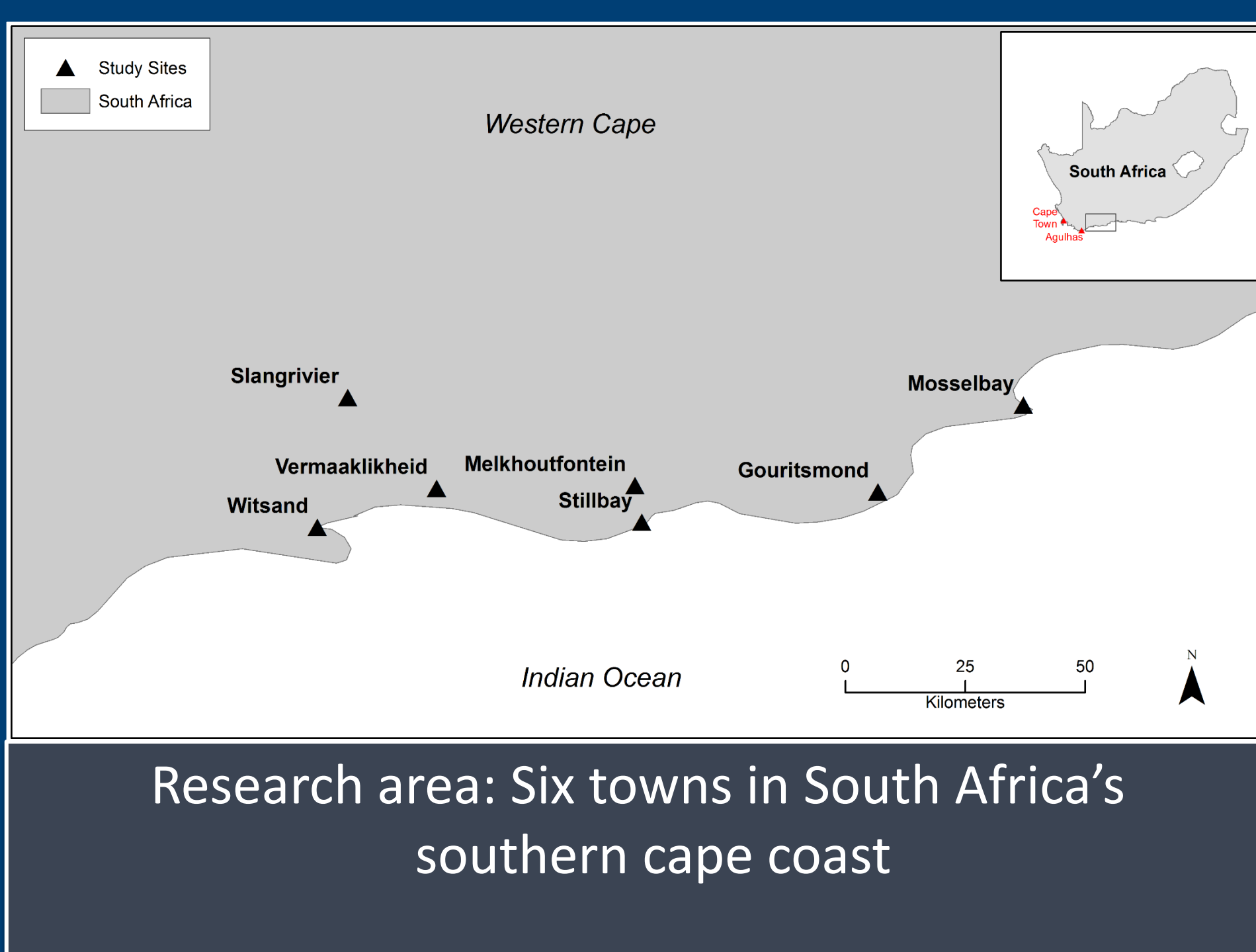


INTRODUCTION

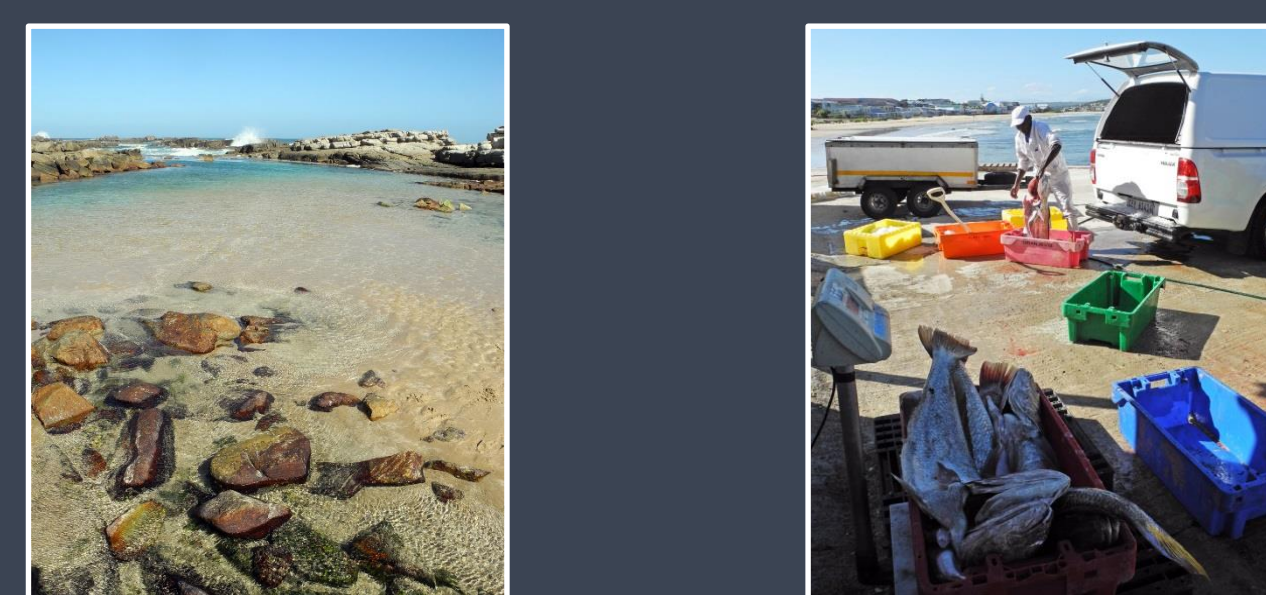
Small-scale fishers and their communities are vulnerable to a range of social and ecological processes. This research contributes to our understanding of the vulnerability of small scale fishers through a detailed study of the Western Cape's small-scale commercial handline fishery. The research focused on the question "How do fishers cope and adapt to the changes brought about by stressors in the system?" The results suggest that there is a strong place-based variation in the adaptation strategies implemented by fishers in the study area.



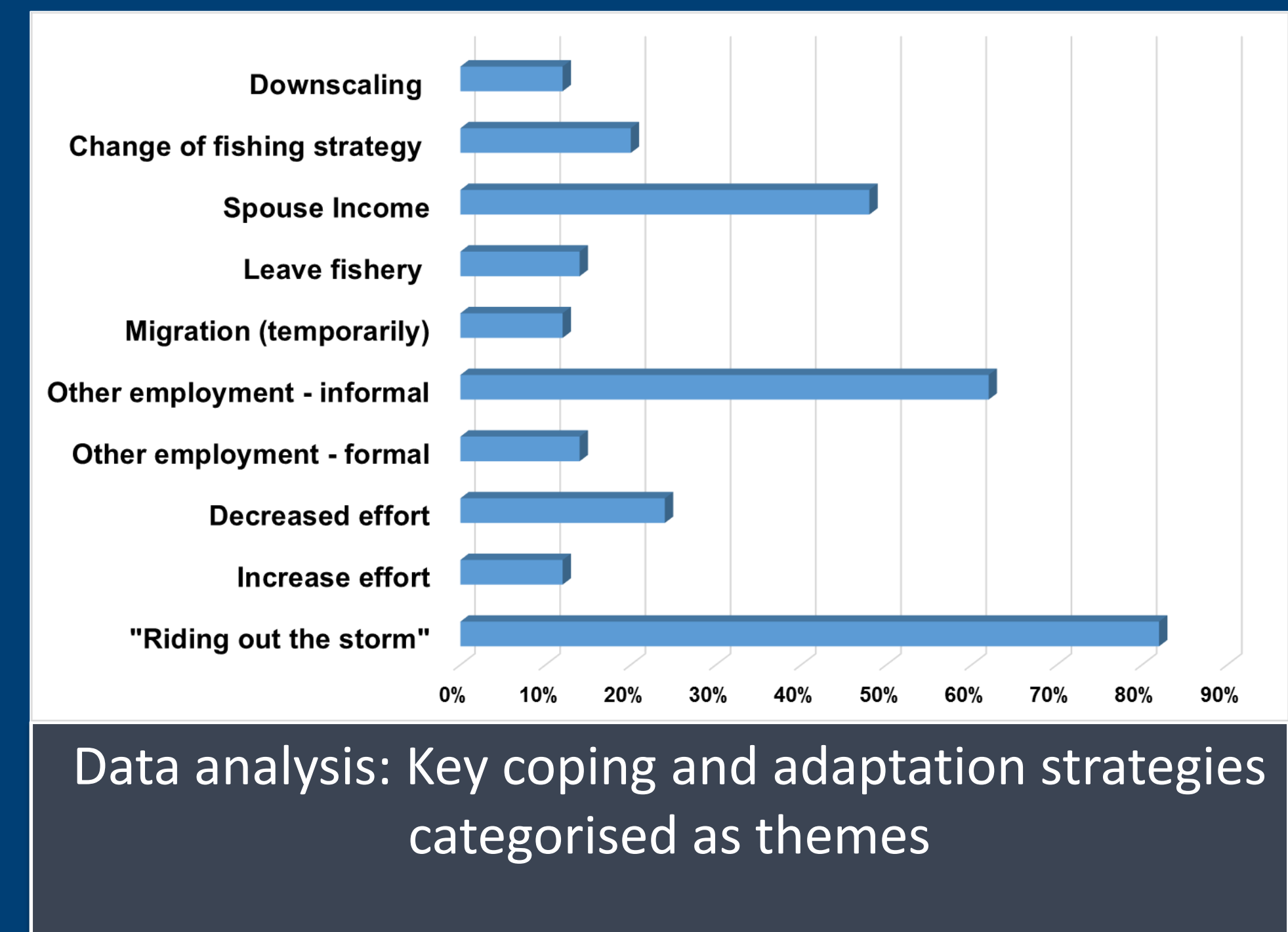
CASE STUDY



50 participants consisting of skippers, boat owners, crew, members from associated industry and spouses/partners



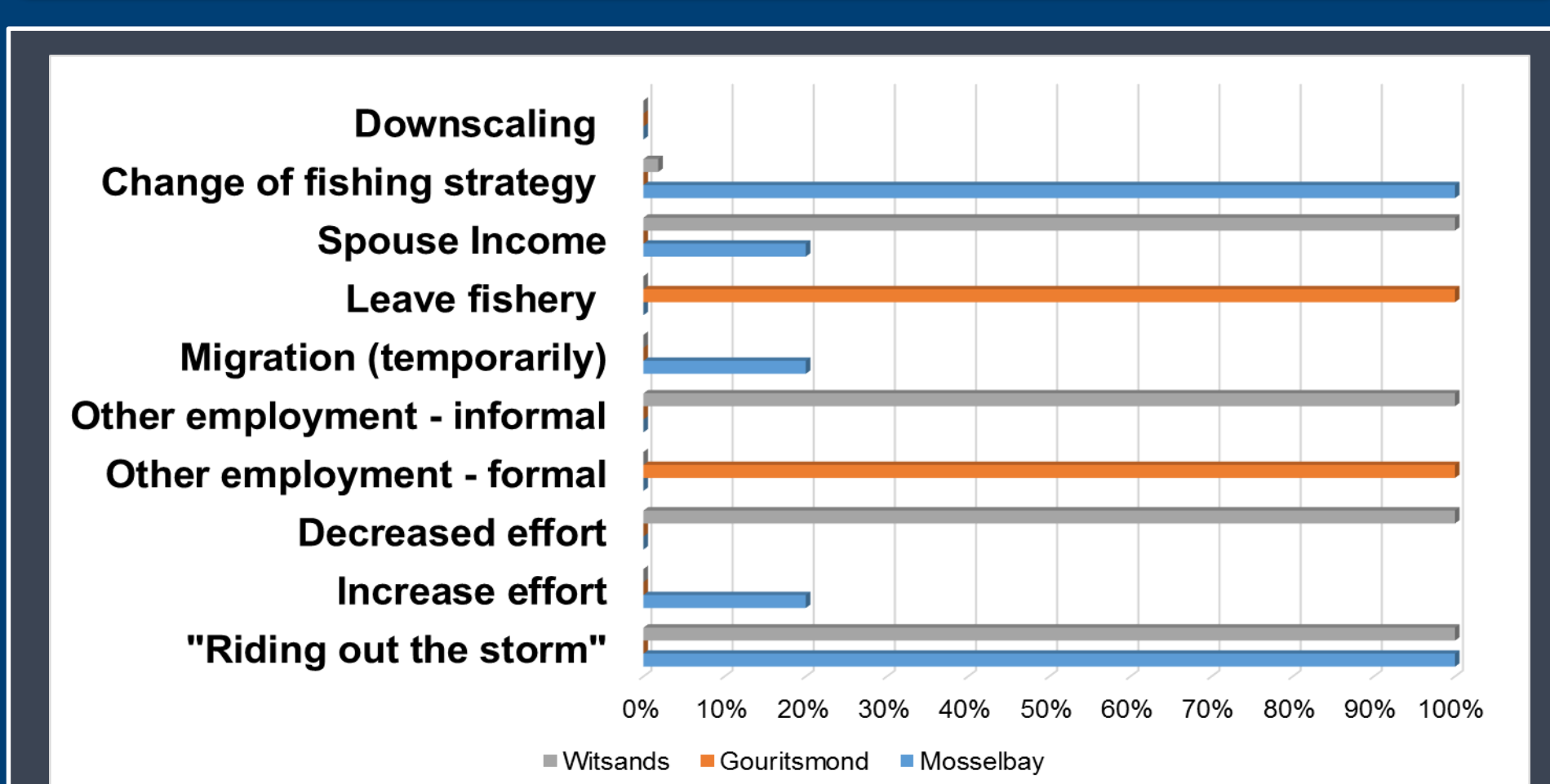
Participants were asked to provide information on alternative activities they employ in order to cope or adapt to changes brought about by the stressors identified.



COMPLEXITY OF RESPONDING TO CHANGE

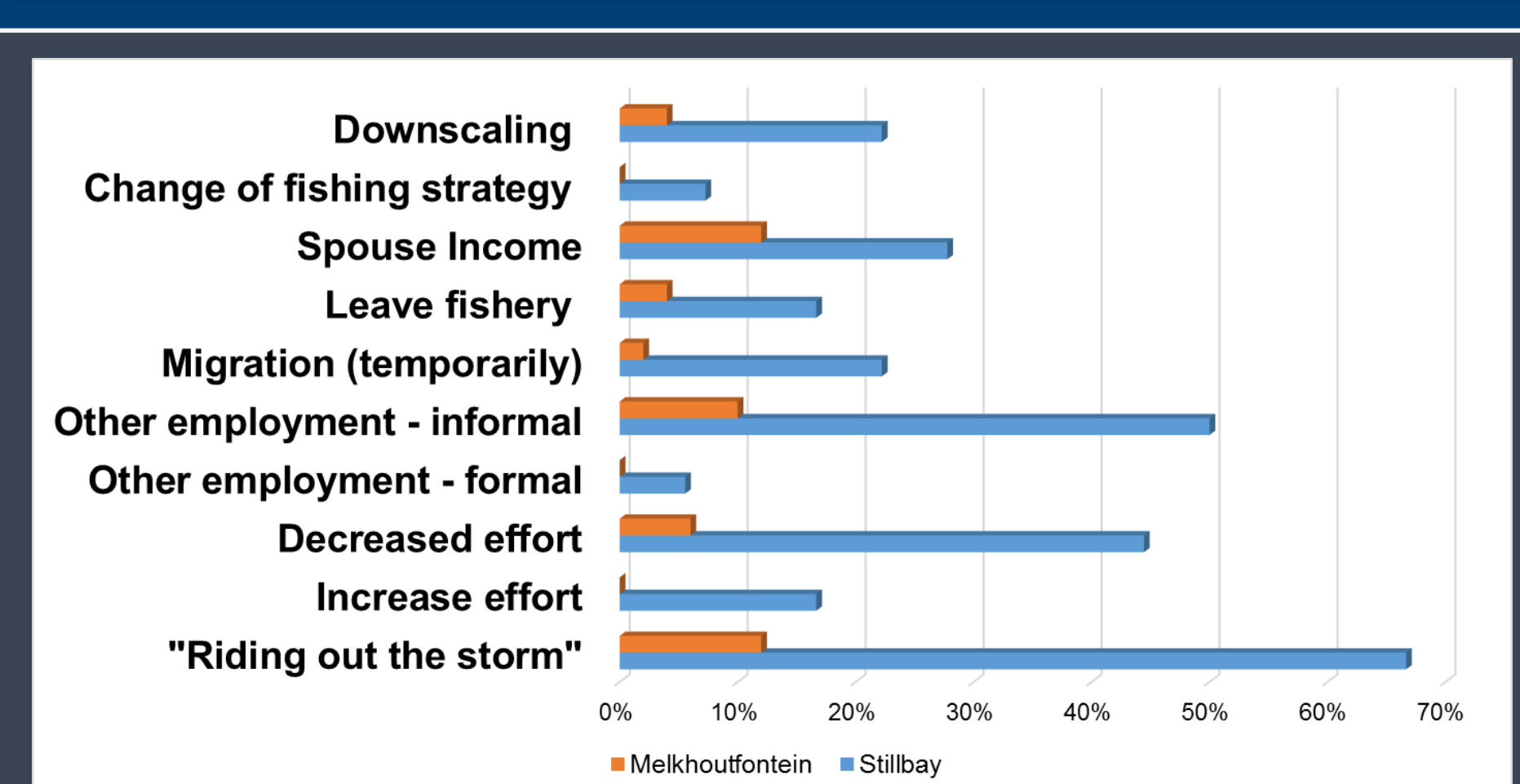
★ Social and economic conditions, and life histories of individuals were the biggest determining factors in decision-making. ★ Cognitive and reflexive decision-making processes are shaped by the experience of past and present environments of both individuals and their communities. ★ These cannot be understood by direct impacts of stressors alone. ★ The importance of culture and belief systems in decision-making is important. ★ The practical implications of actions are not always the overriding concern in decision-making.

Group 1: Business-oriented Fishers



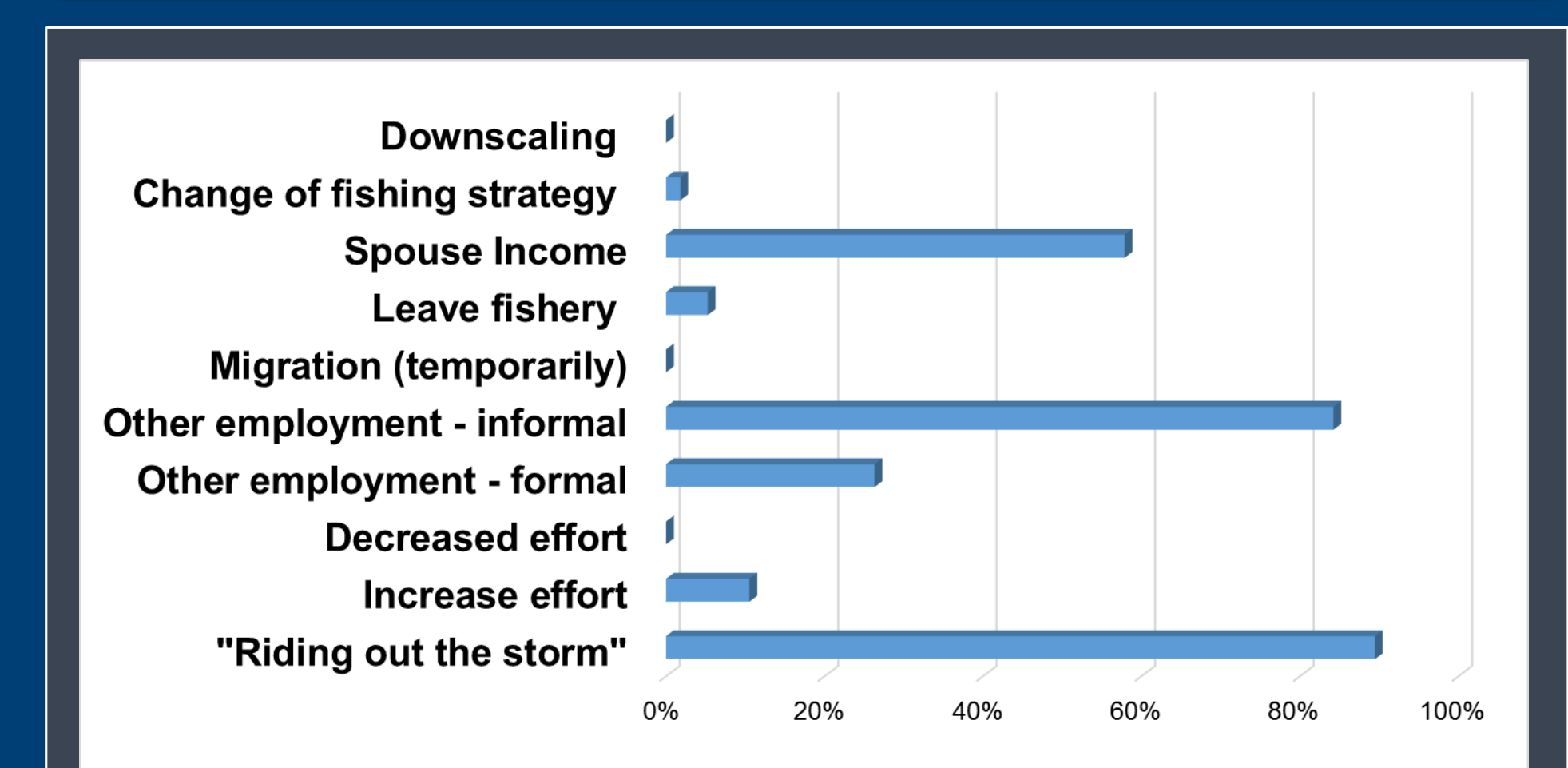
Group 1: Long-term and permanent adaption. This group diversifies within fishery by employing modernised business strategies and intensifying fishing by going further offshore on larger, more economic craft. Ability to adapt shaped by local social and economic considerations¹, which dictates both specific responses and their broad grouping. Members depend on own knowledge systems and each other to affect change. Social capital and knowledge bring about recognition of need to continually adapt.

Group 2: Stillbay & Melkhoutfontein



Group 2: Current coping and adaptation strategies in Stillbay and Melkhoutfontein. Members implement a wide array of alternative income options – this was the most resilient group. Able make it through hard times whilst resuming fishing with largely unchanged business and fishing strategies. Uncertainty of climate dynamics exacerbate the unwillingness to accept that biophysical system may not always return to its former state, thereby undermining the recognition to affect permanent change.

Group 3: Vermaaklikheid



Group 3: Current coping and adaptation strategies in Vermaaklikheid. Characterised by low formal education, poverty and political marginalisation. This group mostly waits for help from the outside. Previous subsistence fishers mostly act as crew on small scale commercial boats. They attempt to diversify outside fishery but opportunities are limited due to their geographic remoteness. Community co-operation is the most important coping strategy² and helps to overcome practical challenges.

CONCLUSION

Varying levels of resilience are displayed by different communities. Too much resilience (Group 2) may have negative consequences for communities as systems attempt to return to the original state once stressors abate³. Their apparent unwillingness to adapt to change may leave them vulnerable. The strong place-based differences emerged as a surprise. In addition to different histories, multiple stressors at various scales, their interaction and feedback loops are likely to influence the observed change in more subtle ways. This will be explored in the next research steps. We aim to use the knowledge gained for interactive and iterative scenario planning for future adaptation strategies with these communities.

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