ENVIRONMENT AGENCY STRATEGIC OVERVIEW FOR SEA FLOODING AND COASTAL EROSION RISK MANAGEMENT

NEWSLETTER 1 – AUGUST 2007

Introduction

In Autumn 2004 we began the consultation process to develop a new strategy for Flood and Coast Erosion Risk Management under 25 headings within the Making Space for Water initiative. The recent flood experience shows how appropriate the selection of these headings has been. Some of these headings can be brigaded under either the Environment Agency’s Strategic Overview for Sea Flooding and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in England (EASO) or the EA’s Strategic Overview on Inland Flooding (this is being taken forward under a separate project). Many of you will have been involved with the consultation process and have contributed by attending workshops. Your contribution has been much appreciated and has helped shape the way ahead.

With the Minister’s announcement on the 22nd June about the EASO and the evolving picture to some of the headings such as the progress on coastal mapping, the number of coastal groups and grant arrangements, etc. it is an appropriate time to give an EASO update via a Newsletter.

Minister’s announcement

Defra consulted on the proposed EASO (Coast) between August and October last year and held a stakeholder conference last September. The proposals have since been further developed in discussion with the Environment Agency, coastal groups and the LGA Coastal Special Interest Group. This led to Defra’s former Minister Ian Pearson announcing the broad shape of the Strategic Overview on 22 June http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2007/070622a.htm. You will see that he referred to the significant work to be done in implementing these changes and called for all parties to work with Defra in producing and delivering a challenging implementation plan. The diagram at the end of this newsletter shows the broad form of the EASO (Coast).

Implementation

We have set up a Project Board comprising the following:

Defra
David Wright
Sarah Steeds
John Horne
Jim Hutchison

Environment Agency
Phil Rothwell
Alison Baptiste
Nick Lyness

Local Government
Steve McFarland
Antony Hill

Their first task will be to produce an agreed implementation plan by 30 September 2007 and then to oversee implementation of all of the different strands of the project. The implementation plan will set out what needs to be done, by whom and by when. We want to bring together all relevant
interests in implementing the EASO (Coast). In commenting on the proposals as they were developed a number of people remarked that the devil would be in the detail of how the proposals were implemented. We therefore want (a) to bring different minds and approaches to the task which should produce a better result and (b) to command widespread confidence that we are fully considering all issues, and any concerns.

The broad strands that need to be implemented are set out below.

**Legislation**

We need to make a number of legislative changes to implement in full the EASO (Coast) and are considering how best to achieve this. Timing of legislation is therefore uncertain at this stage but we will implement as much of the EASO (Coast) as we can using administrative means.

**Policy and Delivery Excellence**

It is also important to note that decisions have already been taken, and substantially implemented, to delegate all Defra approvals for flood and coastal erosion schemes to the Environment Agency by April 2008. David Rooke of the EA wrote to all LAs on 23 April 2007 about the arrangements for grants after April 2008.

The EASO (Coast) will build on this in a number of important ways. The EA will need to have in place strong arrangements for prioritising and planning the works programme and approval of works – whether undertaken by the Agency or others – will be conditional upon effective procurement, delivery and future management of the works. Relatively minor changes to Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) arrangements are also needed and amendments to the various Grant memoranda and EA Financial Memorandum will be needed to reflect the requirements of the EASO (Coast).

Work on delegation of Defra approvals to EA has been overseen by a Coastal Delivery Group comprising representatives from Defra, EA and Local Government/Coastal Groups. This has worked well and their July Update explains the arrangements that have been put in place.

**Governance**

The EASO (Coast) includes extending the role and membership of Regional Flood Defence Committees to include coastal erosion. Legislative change will be necessary but there are key policy issues to resolve first, including setting out exactly what the role of RFDCs should be, and how coastal erosion expertise can best be brought onto the committees (perhaps through a representative from the relevant Coastal Group(s)). We would want to bring together representatives of Defra, EA, RFDC Chairs and LAs/Coastal Groups to make clear recommendations on these issues.

The EASO (Coast) will include a strong future role for Coastal Groups but, in line with recommendations from the Groups themselves, we want to help develop fewer, larger and more strategic organisations that are fully inclusive of all relevant interests around the coast and which have clear and consistent terms of reference and other working arrangements. Some Coastal Groups are already talking about amalgamation. We would want all Coastal Groups to include uniformly strong representation by the EA. Again we would want to bring together representatives of Defra, EA, RFDC Chairs and LAs/Coastal Groups to make clear recommendations on these issues.
Next issue of the Newsletter

We expect to issue the next Newsletter in September when we will be able to provide a more comprehensive update on progress with implementation, including who is working on which strand of the project. This will also include a Q&A section. If you would like to submit any questions for us to respond to, or would like further information, please contact;

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EA lead organisation for sea flooding risk management

LAs remain lead organisations for coastal erosion risk management

Coastal Groups become fewer, bigger and more strategic (as in CG Chairs proposed model) with strong EA representation

RFDCs’ role widened to include coastal erosion with CG representation

**Works Programme**

- EA manages programme of SMPs, quality assures & approves them. SMPs led by best placed organisation.

- EA assesses risk and priorities nationally, drawing on SMPs.

- EA produces 3 year work plans, and allocates funding, based on priorities, outcome measures etc.

- EA funds and oversees works including applying conditions relating to procurement, delivery and future asset management.

- EA works with LAs in timetabling etc the works programme.

**Other Strategic Overview Role**

- EA given powers to prevent new coastal erosion works, or to build or remove defences, to achieve consistency with the Water Framework Directive objectives in the River Basin Management Plan.