A new era for the coast

A new era for flood and coastal erosion risk management starts today with the Environment Agency taking on the strategic overview of the coast.

The Strategic Overview is a new way of working between Government, the Environment Agency, Local Authorities and coastal flooding groups to improve the sustainability, prioritisation and management of all work on the coast. Whilst the Environment Agency has the overview, close collaborative working with Local Authorities on the coast is essential to ensure vital skills and expertise is used effectively for communities in need.

The Minister of State for the Environment, Phil Woolas, said:

“If we are to protect ourselves from the impacts of our changing climate we have to take a strategic approach that ensures flood defences and coastal protection are cost effective and sustainable for the long term.

“As part of our ongoing commitment we have announced record levels of investment in flood risk management and coastal erosion work, but we also have a responsibility to taxpayers who need to know that this funding is being used to best effect. By having a single body responsible for the strategic overview of the coast, we will be better placed to achieve this.”

When & what?

The timeframe for the coastal strategic overview is:
Already in place: The Environment Agency already allocates flood management grant-in-aid for all capital fluvial works to themselves, Local Authorities & Internal Drainage Boards.
From April 08: The Environment Agency will have the new coastal overview role and will allocate grant-in-aid for all capital coastal erosion works

From October 08: The new strategic Coastal Groups will be in place

When opportunity arises: Legislative changes need to be made that give the Environment Agency coastal erosion powers, a supervisory role in coastal erosion and extend the remit of the Regional Flood Defence Committees to include coastal erosion.

The following outlines the arrangements:

- The Environment Agency will be the lead for all sea flooding risk management
  - This means the EA will be accountable for sea flooding risk management decisions (i.e. whether works go ahead, to what standard etc).

- Local Authorities will remain the lead for coastal erosion risk management
  - This means Local Authorities remain accountable for how coastal erosion is delivered. The EA will approve & fund plans, strategies & capital projects to ensure they are sustainable

- The Environment Agency will approve schemes and allocate funding\(^1\) for all capital flood and coastal erosion risk management work to themselves, Local Authorities and Internal Drainage Boards\(^2\)
  - This means the EA prioritises and distributes the Government’s budget for all capital works in flood and coastal erosion risk management based on the new Outcome Measures

- The Environment Agency will have a strategic oversight for all Shoreline Management Plan production and quality control on behalf of Defra
  - This means the EA will work collaboratively with LAs in managing the programme of SMPs, with EA Regional Directors approving SMPs on behalf of the Minister. All Operating Authorities and RFDCs will be encouraged to adopt the SMPs.

- The Environment Agency will work with Local Authorities to ensure that all flood and coastal erosion works are properly planned, prioritised, procured, completed and maintained
  - This means collaborative working between the EA and LAs to ensure that the best of both organisations is used so works are delivered effectively and efficiently.

- Future legislative changes will extend the Environment Agency’s supervisory duty to cover coastal erosion.
  - This means the EA will be able to influence 3rd parties as they currently do for sea flooding.

---

\(^1\) There will be a minimum of £110 million allocated over the three year period for coastal projects undertaken by local authorities and a minimum of £40 million allocated for non-main river works by local authorities and internal drainage boards over the same period.

\(^2\) The Environment Agency compiles the Medium Term Plan for all flood and coastal erosion risk management works and puts it forward to the Minister with recommendation for funding approval.
To support the new Coastal Strategic Overview Role:

- To help make it easier for the public to know who to contact, the Environment Agency is working with Local Authorities to produce maps showing which organisation manages each part of the coastline. These will be made available by 2009.

- Coastal Groups will become fewer, bigger and more strategic
  - There are to be 7 groups in England: North East, East Anglia, South East, Southern, South West, Severn Estuary & North West.
  - Through formalising their arrangements and through stronger relationships with EA and Regional Floods Defence Committees they will be fully able to contribute to effective management of Sea Flooding and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in their areas.

- Future legislation will extend the remit of Regional Flood Defence Committees to include coastal erosion
  - RFDCs will invite a Coastal Group representative to each meeting.
  - Closer working with Regional Flood Defence Committees and Coastal Groups will help improve the planning for flood and coastal erosion risk management, locally.

- EA will promote good practice in procurement
  - The Environment Agency will provide advice, encourage good practice and make the EA procurement frameworks available to Local Authorities and others.

Barbara Young, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency said:

"The coast is what defines us as an island nation; it is the focus of much of our economic, social and environmental heritage and it is the area most at risk from climate change. It is the place where many of us choose to live, work and play and it is vital for the economic, social, health and wellbeing of our nation. It is one of our most distinctive environmental features.

"We are looking forward to this new strategic overview role on the coast and the opportunity it gives us to work with Local Authorities for the future."