



House of Commons
Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

**Coastal flooding and
erosion, and adaptation
to climate change: Interim
Report: Government
Response to the
Committee's First Report
of Session 2019**

**Fourth Special Report of Session
2019–21**

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

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Fourth Special Report

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published its First Report of Session 2019, [Coastal flooding and erosion, and adaptation to climate change: Interim Report](#) (HC 56), on 1 November 2019. The Government response was received on 9 March 2020 and is appended to this report.

Appendix: Government Response

Coastal erosion is a natural process that always has and will shape our coastline. We defend the coastline where it is sustainable and affordable to do so and let it function naturally, in areas where it is not. In at risk areas without defences, communities are supported to help them adapt to coastal change. This Government is committed to supporting coastal communities to unlock barriers to their development and to strengthen their appeal as places to live, work and visit.

Future Policy and Strategy

1. Later this year, the government will set out its policies to tackle flooding and coastal erosion in the long term, and the Environment Agency will publish an updated Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England.

Adaptation to sea-level rise and coastal change

2. There are clear responsibilities for managing coastal erosion and coastal flooding. Local authorities are best placed to understand both the needs of local people, the nature of their coastline and to develop the most appropriate approaches to manage and adapt to coastal change. The Environment Agency has a strategic overview to ensure that decisions are made in a joined-up manner.

3. Our strategies are most effective when government, local authorities, communities and the private sector, work together to ensure there is a shared understanding of future risks and who is best placed to manage them.

4. Defra is co-financing a small project with Coastal-Partnership-East to explore the potential for developing commercial financial products that could assist those at risk of property loss through erosion. The interim report to scope out options is due in the Spring. There will be a further phase to explore the deliverability and practicalities behind the best opportunities identified in the interim report.

5. Defra funded an £11m Coastal Change Pathfinder Programme (2009-11) with 15 local authorities, to explore new approaches that all local authorities could choose to implement, to better manage coastal change. In 2015 we published a report assessing the feasibility of 'rollback'¹. We have since worked with local authorities to share learning from this scheme. In 2015 Local authorities developed and published planning guidance², which is now on the LGA website, based on their experience from the scheme.

1 FD2679 <https://bit.ly/2XtqRXz>

2 Coastal Change Planning Guidance <https://lgacoastalsig.com/resources/coastal-guidance-and-manuals/>

6. Shoreline management plans (SMPs) cover the English coastline and some are world leading in planning for coastal adaptation. The 20 SMPs are produced and updated by coastal groups in consultation with local communities and local partners including local land managers.

7. EA is currently working with coastal groups to improve the access and use of SMPs through the development of a web-based tool. EA is also refreshing the evidence and technical guidance which underpins SMPs which is due to be completed later in 2020. This will make recommendations to the coastal groups who lead on Shoreline Management about how best these plans can be updated, engaging with communities and landowners, to ensure that their recommendations are deliverable

8. We recognise that meaningful long-term engagement with communities affected by coastal change can have significant and positive impacts in encouraging local communities to consider possible approaches which are right for their place. The government's future policies will consider ways to promote the benefits of long-term engagement to support coastal communities in the development of local strategies.

Funding and sharing the balance of costs

9. In the future, we recognize the need sustained for long-term investment to help mitigate and manage the risks associated with flooding and coastal change. The Environment Agency's Long-Term Investment Scenarios (LTIS, 2019) for England is an assessment of what could be achieved if all investment in flood and coastal erosion risk management is optimised from an economic perspective. It is not only an analysis of central governmental spending.

- LTIS:2019 showed that we need an overall long-term annual investment of over £1 billion per year in flooding and coastal change management for the next 50 years for all sources of flooding.
- The long-term investment scenarios also show that for every £1 spent on protecting communities, we avoid around £5 in property damages.

10. Central Government has invested heavily in coastal communities – particularly three departments, Defra, MHCLG and BEIS - reflecting the fact that tackling coastal flooding and erosion is also about local economies, housing and the prosperity of communities. We want to see local authorities proactively and imaginatively blending a range of funding mechanisms in support of their communities. We will be considering approaches like this further, as part of our future policy work to ensure opportunities are maximised. For example; an innovative £20m Sandscaping Scheme has recently been completed at Bacton in Norfolk. It is protecting both a Gas Terminal and nearby villages from erosion. The public element of the cost is around £4.8m and includes contributions from Local Growth investment, the Environment Agency and local councils.

11. Between 2015 and 2021, the Government is investing £2.6 billion to better protect the country from flooding through Grant in Aid. This is funding will support 1,000 flood defence schemes, which will better protect 300,000 homes by 2021 and coastal projects will have received 46% of the available funding by 2021: over £1.2 billion protecting 170,000 properties from coastal flooding and erosion.

12. Our funding is determined on the basis of reducing the impact of flooding to the maximum numbers of homes and the economy, regardless of location. For example: the calculations include avoided damages to agriculture. The formula considers 3 cases where crops are damaged, crops are lost, or activity ceased. In the case of sea flooding losses will be intermittent but in the case of coastal erosion, without a scheme, we assume the farm would disappear.

13. To date, we have secured more than £500 million in partnership funding, in addition to Defra's grant in aid. The Finance Bill 2015 allowed companies and unincorporated businesses to receive corporation tax relief on their partnership funding contributions to FCERM schemes. Businesses can sometimes take the lead. For example, the Kings Lynn Wash East Community Interest Company raised a portion of the cost for beach recycling through a levy of £50 a year on chalets, caravans and other premises behind the defences that benefited from the work.

14. An evaluation of partnership funding⁵ published in 2018³, showed that 421 additional schemes had been funded (than would have been the case had the government been paying the whole cost); 65,000 additional properties were protected from flooding including 1300 coastal properties.

15. In 2019/20 £60m of local levy was contributed to FCERM schemes, of which £7.2m went to coastal schemes.

16. The Environment Agency also provides a £60,000/year Coastal Erosion Assistance Grant to assist local authorities with the immediate costs associated with a loss of homes to erosion.

17. Shoreline Management Plans identify a sustainable management approach for each stretch of coastline, based on policy options that can change across 25-year time horizons known as epochs. Defra's 2006 guidance required that a review of their economic viability was undertaken, to make a broad assessment of the robustness of the preferred policies. However, the justification for a SMP policy was not (necessarily) to be dependent on economic viability, as other benefits may be considered more important (e.g. holding a defence line to sustain a designated habitat).

18. EA is currently working with coastal groups to improve access to and use of SMPs through the development of a web-based tool. EA is also refreshing the evidence and technical guidance which underpins SMPs. Coastal groups will be able to use this evidence and technical guidance to locally review their SMPs with communities and landowners as well as update action plans and, where appropriate, change shoreline management policies. EA will continue to support Coast Protection Authorities in updating and maintaining SMPs and to advise planning authorities on the designation of CCMA's.

Land use planning policy

19. On the coast, the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear about reducing the risk from coastal change by avoiding inappropriate development in vulnerable areas and not exacerbating the impacts of physical changes to the coast. The NPPF encourages local planning authorities to embed local SMP policies in their spatial

plans; and to identify coastal change management areas (CCMAs) where rates of shoreline change are significant over the next 100 years, taking account of climate change. CCMAs should make provision for any vulnerable properties and infrastructure that may need to be relocated at a future point.

20. MHCLG will publish updated Flood Risk and Coastal Change planning practice guidance this year to support the revised NPPF, which provides clear safeguards for protecting people and property.

21. Officials from MHCLG have also been working with DEFRA as part of their Coastal Concordat Steering Group. The Concordat sets out how regulatory bodies can co-ordinate the separate processes for coastal development consents in England.

22. The Towns Fund prospectus, which was published at the end of last year, provides initial guidance for selected local communities on developing proposals for a Town Deal. The Towns Fund's main objective is to increase economic growth and the guidance is clear that all development should be cognisant of flood risk and coastal erosion where relevant.

23. A SMP is a non-statutory document that provides a broad assessment of the long-term risks associated with coastal processes. The review will ensure that the plans are up to date and are using the latest evidence and are more easily accessible to stakeholders such as planners when they update local plans.

24. As a statutory planning consultee, EA advises on all development proposals (other than for minor development) in areas that are at medium or high risk of flooding from the sea. In addition, EA comments on proposals at risk of river flooding, close to Main Rivers and where there are critical drainage problems. Over 97% of all planning applications in 2018/19, where flood risk was considered, were made in line with EA advice, where EA were made aware of the planning decision. It is not possible to separate out which of these applications specifically related to development in areas at risk of coastal flooding or erosion. EA does not make the final planning decision. Local planning authorities are democratically accountable for approving proposals for new development in their local areas.

25. EA will consider measures to:

- continue improving the quality and timeliness of its own advice on planning applications in areas of flooding and coastal change;
- work with coast protection authorities to advise planning authorities on how shoreline management plans can better inform planning policies for the coast, including designation of coastal change management areas;
- work with risk management authorities to support the development of the planning skills and capabilities they need to ensure new development and spatial plans are resilient to flooding and coastal change