

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Environment & Sustainability Committee entitled '*Inquiry into coastal protection in Wales*'.

January 2013

Managing the risks presented by flooding and coastal erosion is a high priority for the Welsh Government and all of the Welsh flood and coastal erosion risk management authorities involved. I welcome this report and the opportunity to discuss what we are doing in respect of coastal protection in Wales

The recommendations contained in the report fit closely with our current policy direction and I am pleased to be able to accept the majority of them unequivocally. Whilst some require further consideration, I support the intent of the proposed action and believe that steps should be taken to achieve the intended outcome.

In accepting the recommendations, I am also pleased to be able to indicate that work on implementing many of them is already in progress.

In completing this inquiry the Environment and Sustainability Committee has gained a significant insight into the issues we face. I note that in the report a clear message throughout is the importance of communication in raising awareness and considering the best methods to address the serious issues we face. This is something that the Welsh Government is committed to delivering and I thank the Committee for their time in collecting the evidence and presenting the findings.

We will continue to work with key stakeholders and community groups to establish how best to communicate the risks we face in Wales and the action we can all take to manage them. Whilst we cannot eradicate the risks of flooding or coastal erosion in Wales, we can, by working together, reduce them and improve the way we prepare for, respond to and recover from flood and coastal erosion events.

I have set out overleaf my response to the Report's individual recommendations.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 1. The Welsh Government to provide assurances as soon as possible of its long-term commitment to a continued strategic regional coastal monitoring programme for Wales, and to outline publicly how it intends that programme to develop going forward, taking account of successful models elsewhere in the EU.

Response : Accept in Principle

I accept this recommendation in principle. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation and is working closely with the relevant stakeholders to achieve this.

The Welsh Government has funded coastal monitoring for many years and agrees with the statement provided by Cardiff University's evidence that "*the need for a well grounded Strategy to inform consistent coastal defence and protection decisions based on sound science cannot be underestimated*". We acknowledge that the findings of the Environment Agency's National Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping (NCERM) project represent a significant step forward in providing the first nationally consistent data extents in relation to coastal erosion. However, more still needs to be done.

The Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre (WCMC) is fully funded by the Welsh Government and will continue to be funded for 2013/14. The WCMC will shortly be submitting their business plan for the continuation of the service for a further five years. The Welsh Government will make a decision on the future of the WCMC and the development of a strategic regional coastal monitoring programme, based on that business case, in early 2013.

Financial Implications

There are additional costs associated with this recommendation.

The Welsh Government currently provided £136,000 to the WCMC annually and invests a further £100,000 annually in coastal monitoring. The business case for the continuation of the WCMC service will include a consideration of costs and they will inform the final decision of the Welsh Government. These costs would need to be met from existing budgets.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 2. The Welsh Government to provide assurances that the final approved second generation of Shoreline Management Plans for Wales clearly reflect and link to the policy objectives of the National Strategy, and there are clear links between the Strategy and other natural resource management policies.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation and the Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation.

The aim of the second generation Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) is to identify long term sustainable approach to managing coastal flood and erosion risks which is entirely consistent with the risk management objectives of the National Strategy. The SMP Action Plans will identify a programme of activities and interventions to deliver the SMP policies and the Welsh Government will consider their alignment with the National Strategy as part of the approval process.

With regards to the other natural resource management policies, there are a range of existing strategies and plans in respect of the functions of the environmental delivery bodies and Flood Risk Management Authorities that set out the way in which they will implement Welsh Government functions. The needs of flood and coastal erosion risk management are comprehensively documented in the Wales Spatial Plan, Future Flooding in Wales Report, Environment Strategy and National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Risk Management in Wales. While these strategies were written at different times and do not all directly cross reference one another, they are broadly consistent.

There is no pressing need to rewrite all of these strategies and plans immediately to ensure a comprehensive approach to flood and coastal erosion risk management in Wales. It is, however, important that the actions outlined in those documents are implemented consistently and we will work with stakeholders to achieve this. Where reviews of policies are undertaken we will ensure that flood and coastal erosion risk management requirements are incorporated.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

This will be progressed as part of the existing work programme.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 3. The Welsh Government to ensure that an appropriate level of resources is dedicated to supporting flood and coastal erosion risk management activities within the budget of the Natural Resources Body.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which aligns with our Wales Spatial Plan, Future Flooding in Wales Report, Environment Strategy and National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Risk Management in Wales.

Natural Resources Wales will be vested with the flood and coastal erosion risk management functions of the Environment Agency, and will be a statutory flood risk management authority under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and a statutory coastal erosion risk management authority under the Coastal Protection Act 1949. The Welsh Government funding historically allocated to the Environment Agency to undertake these functions will be transferred to Natural Resources Wales.

While neither the Countryside Council for Wales or the Forestry Commission have specific powers or duties in respect of either flood or coastal erosion risk management, they do have a range of complementary functions. These include, but are not limited to, functions in respect of conservation, biodiversity, significant land assets and land management and will also be transferred to Natural Resources Wales.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

The Welsh Government directly invests in the region of £40 million in flood and coastal erosion risk management annually, split between capital and revenue. In 2012/13 the Welsh Government has allocated funding to the Environment Agency as follows:

	Capital	Revenue	Total
Environment Agency	8.9m	18m	26.9m

Discussions regarding funding requirements for 2013/14 are underway as part of the annual budget setting process.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 4. The Welsh Government to provide assurances that it will report on outcomes of the plans and activities arising from the National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management, by early 2014.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which aligns with our '*National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management*'.

Section 18 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 places a requirement on the Environment Agency to provide a report to the Minister regarding flood and coastal erosion risk management in Wales and England. This duty will be transferred to Natural Resources Wales and reports are anticipated every two years, with the first report expected in Spring 2014.

In addition to providing an update on flood and coastal erosion risk management matters, the report must include information about the application of the National Strategy. The findings of the report will contribute towards the evidence base used to inform the review and development of the National Strategy.

The Welsh Government has been working closely with the Environment Agency to agree the content of the report. The report will be made publically available and a statement made to the National Assembly to Wales after its publication.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

This is a statutory report required under section 18 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. The costs associated with the production and translation of the report will be met from the Natural Resources Wales budget.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 5. The Welsh Government to develop a community engagement strategy and communication plan with funding to improve general awareness of coastal protection as an all-Wales priority issue, for both communities and the officials and politicians responsible for the delivery of SMPs and the aims of the National Strategy at a local level. This communication and engagement plan should aim to develop and reinforce widespread and non-partisan support for implementing the SMPs and the aims of the National Strategy.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which aligns with our National Strategy.

The National Strategy includes the following objective:

Raising awareness of and engaging people in the response to flood and coastal erosion risk.

The Welsh Government is committed to achieving this through the development of a national single point of contact for enquiries to flood risk, the establishment of a flood advisory service for Wales and supporting other risk management authorities. The Welsh Government actively supports the work of the Environment Agency through their Flood Awareness Wales campaign, which has served to both raise awareness and provide active engagement with communities in areas at flood risk. It is our intention that this work continue.

In 2011 the Welsh Government produced a Community Engagement Toolkit, based on the findings of past experience. This was primarily focussed on the risks of flooding and we will be working to expand this to include the risks of coastal erosion.

The technical language used to communicate flood and coastal erosion risks and the inconsistent description of the different probabilities of the various risks occurring are acknowledged as being a key barrier to successfully communicating and engaging with the public. The Welsh Government is supporting the Environment Agency in its efforts to create a consistent and non-technical way of expressing the risks to everyone. Once this has been agreed will be incorporated within the Community Engagement Toolkit.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

The work on Flood Awareness Wales is funded through the grant-in-aid allocation to the Environment Agency and will transfer to Natural Resources Wales. The work on the language used to communicate flood risk is included in forward work plans alongside the work to update the Community Engagement Toolkit.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 6. The Welsh Government to ensure that its strategic approach to coastal protection includes putting delivery mechanisms in place that support partnership working and a '*Team Wales*' approach. If the Natural Resources Body takes on the coastal protection function, a key responsibility of the body must be to ensure coordination of expertise and sharing of best practice across Wales.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation which aligns with our National Strategy.

The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 places a duty to cooperate on the flood and coastal erosion risk management authorities and this is supported by the National Strategy. Evidence of this in practice has already been seen where Local Authorities are co-ordinating efforts to achieve better value for their expenditure.

Examples of this include:

- The coastal Local Authorities forming 'coastal groups' which meet regularly to discuss coastal risk management issues and opportunities;
- The pooling of resources to procure coastal monitoring contracts jointly, as in the case of both the South Wales Coastal and North Wales coastal groups (the latter being led by Conwy County Borough Council on behalf of Flintshire and Denbighshire councils; and
- Working together to fund and produce the Shoreline Management Plans.

The Environment Act 1995 places a supervisory duty on the Environment Agency in respect of flood and coastal erosion risk management which will be transferred to Natural Resources Wales to allow them to implement their oversight role allocated to them through the National Strategy. One of the key roles of Natural Resources Wales will be to work with the WCMC and Local Authorities to ensure that this work not only continues, but also develops further.

The oversight role includes a specific requirement to lead on the provision of technical advice and support to the other risk management authorities.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

Flood and coastal erosion risk management authorities have a statutory duty to cooperate and share information. Natural Resources Wales will take on the existing oversight role of the Environment Agency.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 7. The Welsh Government to undertake work to identify and tap into new sources of funding for coastal protection: from across Government departmental budgets and from external bodies, including the commercial and business sector and those who benefit from coastal protection initiatives by the protection of economic assets.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation.

The Welsh Government directly invests in the region of £40 million per annum in flood and coastal erosion risk management. In addition to this, Wales has benefitted from the current European Regional Development Fund programme, receiving almost £50 million in convergence and competitiveness funding.

Additional capital funding has been allocated towards flood and coastal erosion risk management activities from both the Wales Infrastructure Investment Fund and central reserves, amounting to £16 million over the next 3 years. We will continue to seek additional direct funding and to work in partnership with other Welsh Government Departments to provide joint funded projects. Examples of this approach include the schemes at West Rhyl, Denbighshire, and Colwyn Bay, Conwy, where investment in flood and coastal risk management is complimenting investment in regeneration.

EU funded programmes for the period 2014-20 are being developed and it is these that we intend to seek funding where possible. It has been confirmed that Inter-Regional Cooperation (Interreg) and Life programmes will continue in the period beyond 2013 and it is hoped that we can seek assistance for initiatives that will help us better understand issues such as coastal erosion.

As part of the development of the Single Investment Programme, consideration is being given to how the business and commercial sectors as well as those who benefit from coastal protection measures might also provide an alternative source of funding. A consultation on a proposed methodology is scheduled for spring 2013 and will include how these alternative sources of funding might be accounted for.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

These activities will be progressed as part of the existing work programme.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 8. The Welsh Government to provide the Committee with a further update on the implementation of the Single Investment Programme. It is suggested that an initial progress update should be provided in autumn 2013.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation, which aligns with our National Strategy.

The National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management: Wales includes a commitment to establish a national funding policy and prioritisation methodology, which targets investment at the most at risk communities. Earlier this year a task and finish group was established, which brought together representatives from the Environment Agency, Local Authorities and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to consider ways in which this could be achieved and to develop a methodology for determining the most at risk communities in Wales.

A consultation on a proposed methodology is scheduled for spring 2013. The Welsh Government will be pleased to provide an update on the progress made in developing the Single Investment Programme in autumn 2013 once the outcome of the consultation is known.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

This will be progressed as part of the existing work programme.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 9. The Welsh Government to report to the Committee as soon as possible on its assessment of how lessons learnt from the Pathfinder projects in England can be applied in Wales, and whether it intends to pilot similar projects.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation.

The Welsh Government will shortly convene an advisory group to look in more detail at the risks of coastal erosion, building on the outcomes of the NCERM project. The assessment of the Pathfinder projects will be completed as part of the work of this group and a report will be provided to the Committee in the autumn of 2013.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

This will be progressed as part of the existing work programme.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 10. The Welsh Government to prioritise reviewing the adequacy of the planning provisions relevant to coastal protection, in particular Technical Advice Notes 14 and 15, within its work streams for revising the planning system in Wales. Full consideration should be given to views expressed by the stakeholders who gave evidence to the Committee's inquiry.

Response : Accept in Principle

I accept this recommendation in principle.

The Welsh Government has always accepted that a review of TAN14 and TAN15 is likely to be required as a result of emerging policy developments resulting from aspects of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, Marine Spatial Planning, National Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping project, and the revisions to Shoreline Management Plans.

However, until the objectives of these other policy areas are clearly established and publically adopted it would be premature to embark on a formal review. A review without a robust evidence base to provide clarity and purpose could become a focus for delaying production of other plans and strategies that rely on national planning policy. This could result in undermining much needed investment and regeneration across Wales in areas not actually affected by coastal erosion or flooding issues. Therefore now is not the time to embark on a formal review of TAN14 and TAN15.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

This will be progressed as part of the existing work programme.

The Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 11. In order to ensure timely implementation of the Shoreline Management Plans the Welsh Government needs to prioritise as a matter of urgency the completion of the necessary assessments of the shoreline management plans required by the Habitats Directive. The Welsh Government should also prioritise the identification and creation of suitable compensatory habitat.

Response : Accept

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government fully supports the direction of this recommendation.

The Welsh Government is committed to the completion of the necessary appropriate assessments of the Shoreline Management Plans and work is continuing to successfully complete this. I have asked the Environment Agency to develop a programme of habitat creation to meet the compensatory measures required by the Habitats Directive.

Financial Implications

There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation.

This will be progressed as part of the existing work programme.