



Wales Coastal Flooding Review: Project 8 Report – Recommendation 39

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Recommendation 39: A review of Welsh Coastal Groups and the Wales Coastal Group Forum

Introduction

Following the coastal flooding of late December 2013 and early January 2014, the Minister for Natural Resources asked Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to review the coastal flooding events. The Review was to be delivered in two phases and in collaboration with Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) in Wales¹. Phase 2 of this Review identified 47 Recommendations to improve Wales' resilience to coastal flooding.

Thirty of the Recommendations were packaged into ten Projects to reflect common technical themes, with the remaining seventeen addressed individually. The 10 Projects are listed below:

Project 1 – Flood Forecasting and Coastal Design

Project 2 – Flood Warning and Forecasting

Project 3 – Community Resilience

Project 4 – Operational Response

Project 5 – Coastal Defences

Project 6 – National Coastal Defence Dataset and Inspection

Project 7 - Skills and Capacity Audit and Roles and Responsibilities

Project 8 – Review of Coastal Groups

Project 9 – Coastal Adaptation

Project 10 – Infrastructure Resilience

Project 8 is fully implemented through Recommendation 39. This recommendation charges the Welsh Government to:

Undertake a review of Welsh Coastal Groups and the Wales Coastal Group Forum. This review should include, as appropriate, links and relationships with other similar groups who have a role in the management of flood and coastal erosion risks.

This review should identify improvement options to maximise efficient and effective delivery of flood and coastal risk management.

¹ A Welsh Risk Management Authority is defined in Section 6 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 as the Environment Agency (Natural Resources Wales since April 2013), a lead local flood authority, a district council for an area for which there is no unitary authority, an IDB for an internal drainage district that is wholly or mainly in Wales (Natural Resources Wales since April 2015) and a water company that exercises functions in relation to an area in Wales.

The Welsh Coastal Groups

The five coastal groups in Wales are:

- Cardigan Bay Coastal Group
- Swansea & Carmarthen Bay Coastal Engineering Group
- Severn Estuary Strategic Coastal Group (England & Wales)
- Liverpool Bay Coastal Group (England & Wales)
- Ynys Enlli to Great Ormes Head Coastal Group

The Chairs of each Coastal Group meet through the Welsh Coastal Groups Forum. Welsh Government has representation on the Forum and acts as secretariat.

Headline Summary of Findings

Following this review of the Coastal Groups and Forum, the Welsh Government feels that they have a key role going forward within the wider governance of the flood and coastal erosion management in Wales. This review report clarifies this ongoing role through a series of actions and was agreed at the Wales Coastal Group Forum on the 18th May 2016, thereby marking the completion of Project 8/Recommendation 39.

Methodology

The review was undertaken through 3 stages:

Stage 1: A questionnaire was sent to the 15 Welsh Maritime Local Authorities (MLAs), Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) during June 2015 with responses received by July 2015. As part of this exercise, a request for the Terms of Reference (ToR) of each Coastal Group was also sent during July 2015.

Stage 2: Informal interviews with individuals from selected organisations including NRW and WLGA.

Stage 3: Desk based analysis of the summary of questionnaire responses, ToRs and a wider desk based literature review of the governance around coastal flood risk management in Wales was undertaken through the winter 2015 & spring 2016.

Review Context

The Coastal Groups membership consists primarily of LAs with NRW but other interest groups are sometimes represented. Groups are chaired by the Welsh Maritime Local Authorities and as such are primarily responsible to these Authorities and those member organisations that provide a contribution towards the operation of the Group. The Welsh Government has observer status on the five Welsh Coastal Groups and does not currently pay a direct contribute towards their operation through subscription rates, although strategic direction and financial support for the

Group's work programme has occurred in the past. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has contributing membership status on at least two of the Groups (Ynys Enlli to Great Ormes Head & Swansea and Carmarthen Bay Coastal Engineering Group). A significant part of the function of the Coastal Groups is to increase the collaboration, best practice and data sharing between the constituent membership. This work will obviously continue as befitting the needs of the membership.

This review does not seek to impose significant changes to the operation of the Coastal Groups but rather seeks to define the role of the Groups and the Coastal Forum (where Welsh Government is directly represented) within the wider governance around the flood and coastal erosion risk management sector in Wales. It is through this context that this review and the proposed actions are made.

The Wider Context: The planned Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee

The Environment Act 2016 includes provisions (under Section 81, Part 7) which amends the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to enable the abolishment the current Flood Risk Management Wales (FRMW) Committee and establishment of a new committee to be known as the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee.

The new Committee will provide advice to the Welsh Minister on flood risk management from main rivers, surface water, ordinary watercourses, reservoirs and the sea as well as coastal erosion. New regulations will be established later this year regarding membership and administration.

It is intended that this new Committee will meet for the first time in autumn 2016 and be the focus for all matters of advice on flood and coastal risk management to the Welsh Minister and the Welsh Government. Therefore, the Committee will be expected to provide a key input into the strategic direction for flood and coastal risk management.

For the Committee to be effective, it must have effective support structures in place that enable:

- a) accurate and relevant information to be fed up from practitioners and organisations at the operational level; and
- b) effective dissemination of the national strategic direction to organisations and practitioners.

Coastal issues will be a key element of the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee's remit and the Welsh Government feels that the Coastal Forum is ideally placed to act as a link between the Coastal Groups and the Committee.

Summary of questionnaire responses

The questionnaire was sent to the 15 Welsh Maritime Local Authorities (MLAs). Of these 15, responses were received from 10 authorities plus the WLGA and NRW. Responses were received from local authority officers representing membership from each of the 5 Welsh coastal groups.

The questionnaire asked 11 questions which are listed below, along with a summary of responses.

What in your opinion has been the key role(s) for the coastal groups to date?

- a. The majority of respondents stated that historically the key role of the coastal groups had been the production of the second iteration of the Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs). Other key roles were listed as collaboration, knowledge and experience sharing between coastal Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) and supporting the Welsh Coastal Monitoring Centre (WCMC).

Do you feel that there will be a need for the coastal group in the future? If so, please outline why.

All respondents stated that there will be a need for the coastal groups in the future. The main reasons identified were:

- a. Taking forward the implementation of and monitoring of SMPs through a regional approach;
- b. Continued collaboration and sharing of knowledge and best practice. The point was made that MLAs have varying levels of capacity and experience in coastal practice;
- c. To promote economies of scale during procurement of surveys and/or further SMP work;
- d. To oversee monitoring of the coastline.

What in your opinion will be the key role(s) for the coastal group going forward?

Respondents generally gave similar responses as to the previous question, but with the following additional points:

- a. Coastal groups should provide Welsh Government with information and policy development advice on coastal matters, incl. raising issues of concern;
- b. To provide a route to undertake cross border collaboration where needed.

Please provide examples when the coastal group had been particularly effective.

Most respondents referenced:

- a. The production of the SMP 2s;

- b. Regional monitoring of the coastline, including supporting the WCMC in bringing forward a National Specification for Monitoring.

Please provide any examples when the coastal group could have been more effective.

Some respondents stated that the dissemination of the SMP policies and the reasoning behind them could have been more effective. Another issue that multiple respondents mentioned were the ability of officers from LAs to attend and/or commit time. It was mentioned that the ability of a Chair to devote time to a group is critical to that group's effectiveness.

Please provide examples when the Welsh Coastal Forum had been particularly effective.

Most respondents felt that the coastal forum is fairly effective at bringing all local authorities together for discussion. Most but not all felt that the forum was good at disseminating WG guidance but that its full potential was not being achieved.

Please provide examples when the Welsh Coastal Forum could have been more effective.

Multiple respondents commented that the coastal forum could have been more effective at disseminating a consistent process for the production of the SMPs. Most but not all felt that the forum was good at disseminating WG guidance but that its full potential was not being achieved. Some felt that broader membership may be needed. It was also felt that the forum could have a greater role in coordinating coastal monitoring and a greater support role in any response to national coastal flooding.

What in your opinion are the key links with other organisations/bodies that the coastal group should have in order to be effective?

Does the current representation within the coastal group allow the roles defined above to be delivered effectively? If not, please explain how amending representation could help the group improve deliver better.

Respondents generally felt that greater links and wider representation with other organisations/bodies is needed. It was generally felt that coastal groups need a stronger direction from Welsh Government with greater WG representation needed, perhaps through the Forum. Other organisations/bodies identified were:

- NRW
- Landowners incl. National Trust & Network Rail;
- WCMC (once role is clarified);
- Trunk Road Agencies;
- LA officers responsible for biodiversity and Wales Coastal Path.

Do you feel that the annual subscription for the coastal group is set at the right level? If not, please state whether you feel it should be higher or lower and the reasons why.

It is clear from responses that subscription rates vary greatly across the various coastal groups. The Swansea & Carmarthen Bay coastal Group appears to have the

highest rate at £6,500 pa (although this was waived last year due to the presence of a substantial surplus). The Severn Estuary coastal group has a substantially lower rate of £600 and the Liverpool Bay coastal group a lower rate again at £250 pa. From the responses it appears that the LAs set and pay the subscription and they are generally satisfied with the rates (although not universally as one respondent commented that the groups generally seem to have a surplus that they are 'unsure what to do with'). Our remit to influence the subscription rate appears to be limited. More investigation may be needed to determine specific rates and what precisely the rates are used for.

Please add any other comments that may be useful during the review of the coastal groups.

Some respondents felt that there were possibly too many forums/groups in flood management in Wales, although it was important in any streamlining exercise that coastal issues are not side-lined. A comment was made that the effectiveness of the groups and Forum are dependent on the time given by local authority officers, which may become scarcer with local authority austerity and reorganisation.

Discussion of Proposed Actions

The questionnaire response and interviews highlighted views that the Coastal Groups and Forum would benefit from an effective strategic direction from Welsh Government. Given the planned establishment of the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee later this year, there is now an opportunity for the Coastal Groups and Forum to take a formal part within a wider governance structure around flood and coastal erosion risk management. It is proposed that the Coastal Forum be represented on the new Committee and be the key conduit between it and the Coastal Groups. This role would involve both disseminating the strategic views of the Committee and Minister to the Groups, while also providing key advice and guidance on coastal matter for the Committee.

Proposed Action 1:

Coastal Groups and Forum to form part of the wider governance structure around the planned Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee. This would involve the Coastal Groups taking a strategic lead from the Committee and the Minister, while providing information and advice to the Committee via the Coastal Forum.

The Coastal Groups already have strategic aims within their Terms of Reference and it is likely that these would overlap with the strategic national aims of the Minister and the new Committee. The production of the Shoreline Management Plans (SMP2) is rightly hailed as a major achievement of the Coastal Groups both in the questionnaire response and the interviews. Now that work is completed, the ongoing focus needs to be on the implementation of the SMPs and specifically, overcoming the socio-economic impacts that have already arisen. The Welsh Government is currently working closely with Gwynedd County Council and undertaking research in the community of Fairbourne with the aim of improving engagement in affected communities and developing a 'toolkit' for the adaptation that will be necessary in many coastal communities. The support of the Coastal Groups in developing this toolkit would be welcomed by Welsh Government.

Similarly, the Welsh Government will shortly be seeking to re-establish a Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre (WCMC). The Coastal Groups already contain a reference to working with the WCMC within their Terms of Reference, but it is suggested that this now also become a strategic priority.

Proposed Action 2:

Coastal Groups seek to contribute towards the following national strategic aims:

- a) Contributing along with Local Authorities, Welsh Government and NRW towards the development of a toolkit for coastal adaption of communities for SMP implementation;*
- b) Working with a re-established Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre (WCMC) to provide an effective service to Risk Management Authorities and Welsh Government.*

It is apparent from the questionnaire response and interviews that there is a lack of consistency between the Terms of Reference of the Coastal Groups. As previously mentioned, each Group has its primary responsibility to its membership. However, if the Groups and Forum are to take a key place within the wider governance of the new Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee, it is suggested that a level of consistency is encouraged by the Coastal Forum. This is specifically true of the subscription rate. While it is accepted that different Coastal Groups may have different work programmes at different costs, it would be beneficial for each Coastal Group to have a standard methodology of calculating these costs and subsequent subscription rates. Likewise, the Coastal Groups tend to have varying organisations as either full contributing members or invited members. It is therefore also suggested that the Forum encourage the Groups to compare and review their membership to ensure that they are suitable.

Proposed Action 3:

Coastal Forum to standardise the Terms of Reference of the Coastal Groups, including encouraging consistency in the calculation of subscription rate and membership organisations.

Conclusions

The following actions are therefore proposed for agreement by the Coastal Forum.

Proposed Action 1:

Coastal Groups and Forum to form part of the wider governance structure around the planned Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee. This would involve a two way process, with the Coastal Groups providing information and advice, while taking account of the strategic priorities of the Committee.

Proposed Action 2:

Coastal Groups seek to contribute towards the following national strategic aims:

- a) Contributing along with Local Authorities, Welsh Government and NRW towards the development of a toolkit for coastal adaption of communities for SMP implementation;***
- b) working with a re-established Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre (WCMC) to enable the collation and standardisation of Welsh coastal monitoring data.***

Proposed Action 3:

Coastal Forum to standardise the Terms of Reference of the Coastal Groups, including encouraging consistency in the calculation of subscription rate and membership organisations.