

Coastal Literacy or bust

An intrinsic understanding of coastal management...

Would you ask someone to give up their home, often the bulk of their life's savings, so that the neighbouring town can have its new sea defences? I certainly wouldn't like to. But people will have to do this. Such is the reality of adaptation to climate change.

Shoreline Management Planning was introduced in the 1990s to provide a more strategic policy for coastal defences. The second generation plans are set against tighter government guidance, recognising that sea level rise and other climate change effects mean we cannot continue raising the standard of sea defences everywhere. It is not simply a matter of cost – ad hoc interventions in natural processes tend to have unintended consequences for people and the environment. But how well and how widely are these realities understood?

It is clear to CoastNet through our work with affected communities that government thinking has progressed far beyond that of the public and local politicians, opening up a huge knowledge gap, which is severely hampering the implementation of government policy. Here are some of the typical questions that people ask:

- Why can't things stay as they are?
- Why is biodiversity better protected than we are?
- Why are many 'hold the line' policies not funded?

- Why can I not get compensation if my house is to be lost, when compensation is given for building airports and roads?
- Why didn't I know of the risk when I bought my home?
- Why is it so hard to find out who does what, and to get clear answers?
- If the Dutch can do it, why can't we?

The need to educate the public about climate change is universally accepted. In relation to coasts it is not so. Our ultimate aim should be to nurture a coastal literate generation, having a sophisticated understanding of coastal matters and taking full part in the difficult decision-making that lies ahead. But it will not be easy. The negative impacts on communities affected are far more readily apparent than for climate change. The education imperative is much stronger.

Innovation is required, something new, something we at CoastNet call 'Coastal Literacy'. A coastal-literate person (be it a technician, politician or member of the public):

- Understands the Essential Principles and Concepts about the functioning and management of the coast, encompassing social, economic and environmental aspects;
- Can communicate about the coast in a meaningful way; and



- Is able to make informed and responsible decisions regarding the coast and its resources.

Coastal Literacy must go beyond consultation or involvement, to embed an intrinsic understanding of coastal management within the community and decision-makers: who does what and why, what are the differing perceptions of stakeholders, what are the options for the future?

The concept will be tested through the Defra Coastal Change Pathfinder programme, working closely with Chichester District Council.

We believe Coastal Literacy has a national role to play in adaptation to coastal change. If you are interested in the role of Coastal Literacy where you live, contact Alex Midlen on the details below.



Alex Midlen
Strategic Director

CoastNet
The Gatehouse
Rowhedge Wharf
High Street
Rowhedge
Colchester CO5 7ET

Tel: +44 (0)1206 728644

www.coastnet.org.uk
www.imcore.eu