



EU focus on **coastal zones**



European Commission

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on **coastal zones**

Turning the tide for Europe's coastal zones



European Commission

Directorate-General
Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://europa.eu.int>).

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

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Introduction

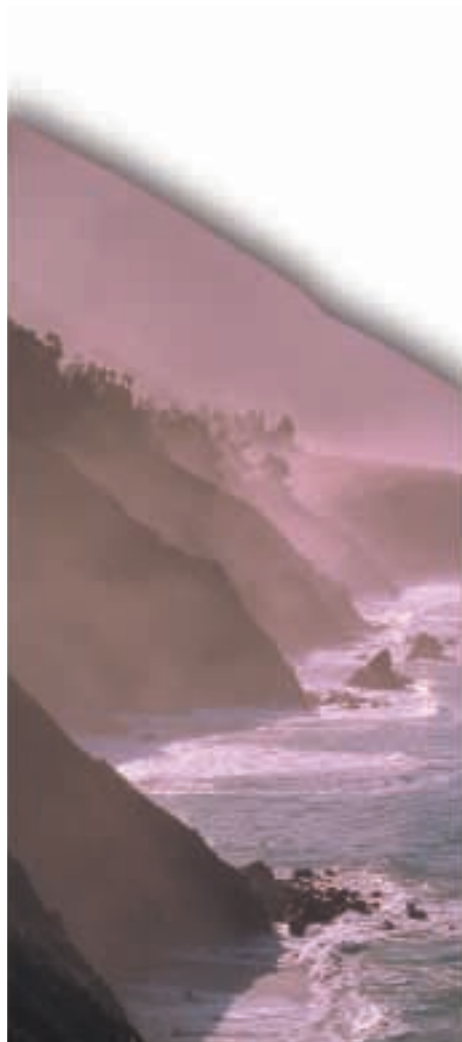
The European Union's coastal regions are under constant pressure. Almost half of the Union's population now lives within 50 kilometres of the sea (1) and coastal zone resources produce much of the Union's economic wealth. The fishing, shipping and tourism industries all compete for vital space along Europe's estimated 89 000 kilometres of coastline, and coastal zones contain some of Europe's most fragile and valuable natural habitats.

However, the increasing demand for coastal resources is leading to their degradation — reduced water quality and quantity, accelerated erosion, accumulation of pollution, loss of fisheries resources, etc. Moreover, this degradation has negative social and economic consequences.

Many of the problems faced by Europe's coastal regions involve more than one country. If an oil tanker were to sink in the English Channel, for example, the resulting slick would be likely to affect both the United Kingdom and France. Similarly, industrial or agricultural pollution that might find its way into the Danube River in Austria would cross several national borders before finally flowing into the Black Sea thousands of miles away in Romania.

The EU's coastal zones can also find themselves influenced by policies that at first glance seem to have nothing at all to do with them. The EU's common agricultural policy (CAP), for example, can influence how much excrement from intensive pig and cattle farms is regularly washed into

(1) European Commission communication to the Council and the European Parliament on integrated coastal zone management: A strategy for Europe (COM (2000) 547).





streams and rivers. Nitrates found in manure and chemical fertilisers promote the growth of blue-green algae, which reproduce at a phenomenal rate choking many other forms of aquatic life. When it reaches the sea, this algae-rich water can cause severe problems for coastal regions, particularly in the form of polluted bathing beaches. Evolution of the CAP will hopefully help to reduce the problem of nitrate pollution.

Similarly, EU policies intended to influence the economic viability of rural and mountainous areas can have a strong influence on the number of people migrating to the coast.

All of these factors suggest that Europe's coastal regions are entitled to special attention from the Union's policy-makers. This is why the European Union is working to introduce a coordinated policy for the Union's coastal regions⁽¹⁾. As well as taking steps to improve the EU policies that influence coastal zones, the European Commission is calling on Member States to put in place national strategies for what is known as integrated coastal zone management (ICZM).

The Commission's aim in promoting ICZM is to bring together all the different local, regional, national and Europe-wide policies and actors who have an impact on the day-to-day life of the Union's coastal regions.

(1) COM(2000) 547, 27 September 2000.

ICZM at a glance

ICZM is designed to 'join up' all the different policies which have an effect on the Union's coastal regions. It is about both planning and management of coastal resources and coastal space. It is not a 'one off' solution but an ongoing dynamic process that will evolve over time.

The need to bring together all the local, regional, national and European policy-makers and other stakeholders whose activities affect coastal regions is central to ICZM. Without coordination at all levels, efforts to protect the Union's coastlines will only have limited success. These 'stakeholders' should include not only government officials and policy-makers but also other interested parties such as local residents, non-governmental organisations and businesses.

ICZM is not just an environmental policy. While the need to protect the functioning of natural ecosystems is a core aim of the strategy, ICZM also seeks to improve the economic and social well-being of coastal zones and help them develop their full potential as modern, vibrant communities. In the coastal zone, these environmental and socioeconomic goals are intrinsically interconnected.



Europe's coastline

The EU's coastline is 89 000 kilometres long, and about half of the population of those Member States with a coastline lives within 50 kilometres of the sea. Coastal zones already include the Union's most valuable habitats; a recent Commission study (1) indicates that the total ecosystem benefits generated by the EU coastal zones are worth more in economic terms than the national GDP of any of the smaller EU countries. The European Commission believes that a more coordinated approach is necessary to ensure that this economic resource is not destroyed.

If EU governments put in place national strategies for ICZM, they could improve both the economic and environmental well-being of their coastal zones. According to studies of the potential socioeconomic value of ICZM, the estimated gross annual benefits of ICZM (including habitat protection, local business and tourism) could be worth up to EUR 4.2 billion for the European Union as a whole. Apart from the net economic gains, the qualitative benefits — which will vary according to individual ICZM initiatives — will include more cohesive coastal communities.

In short, national ICZM strategies would cost a relatively small amount of money to implement, but could generate significant sustained economic returns.



(1) *An assessment of the socioeconomic costs and benefits of integrated coastal zone management*, Firm Crichton Roberts, November 2000. See http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/iczm/socec_en.pdf

Europe's coastlines — the issues

Europe's coastal zones probably face a larger number of economic, social and environmental problems than any other areas of the European Union. From Lapland to Crete, coastal zones are facing serious planning and management challenges, with the EU's ultra-peripheral zones often representing the synthesis of the many problems that can face the coastal zones. The following are just a few of the better known examples of these problems.

Badly planned tourist developments

When properly managed, tourism can prove a vital source of economic regeneration for coastal zones. However, along many parts of the Union's coastline, tourism has developed in a haphazard and unplanned fashion and causes major social and environmental problems.

Coastal tourist developments tend to put a huge strain on local supplies of fresh water, for example, and in some areas of southern Europe this has caused real problems. In many parts of the Mediterranean, including the Greek islands, overuse of scarce groundwater supplies has caused seawater to seep into the local water table, making it undrinkable. Many of these islands also suffer from inadequate facilities for disposal of solid waste, resulting in widespread unauthorised dumps.



Poorly managed coastal resorts can also cause serious air and sea pollution. Tourist developments tend to consume large amounts of fossil fuels and this reduces local air quality. Aside from being used for cooking and heating in hotels, cafés and restaurants, fossil fuels also power the huge

numbers of motorcycles, cars and pleasure craft found in coastal tourist resorts.

Poorly planned seaside tourist developments can also have a detrimental effect on existing local industries and on the social fabric of local communities. In the Greek Cyclades Islands, for example, there are conflicts between tourism and the mining industry. Tourism has also led to a decline in traditional labour-intensive farming methods as local people have abandoned their former agricultural work to take up jobs in bars, cafés and nightclubs.

In the Gironde estuary in France, pleasure boats with hulls coated in a toxic anti-barnacle paint are causing serious problems for local fish farms.

But experts insist that tourism can play a positive role in coastal regions if it is properly controlled. In Storstrøm County in Denmark, tourism — particularly in the low season — is helping to compensate for declining employment in fishing, agriculture, heavy industry and shipping.

The decline of the fishing industry

For many of Europe's coastal towns and villages, fishing has been a way of life for centuries. However, the Union's fishing industry as a whole is currently facing serious difficulties. In many areas, over-fishing has brought dramatic reductions in fish stocks and this in turn has led to job cuts and economic hardship. In a bid to reduce over-fishing, the EU's common fisheries policy attempts to control the volume of fish caught in Union waters and to cut the number of boats, through the multi-annual guidance programmes for the fishing fleets (MAGPs).



But this reduction in fleet capacity has also increased unemployment in many coastal areas. As traditional fishing ports have closed or reduced their activities, people have moved elsewhere, and this process has changed the fundamental character of many coastal regions. Many towns that relied on their image as fishing communities to attract tourists have seen visitor numbers fall dramatically as the local seafarers have hung up their nets for good.

Some areas have tried to develop alternatives to the fishing industry and give a new boost to local economies. But this process has not been easy and, in many regions, opportunities for employment outside the fishing industry remain rare.

In regions where the fishing industry still plays an important economic role, it is frequently forced to compete for space with other shoreline users. For example, sea-front planning, marinas and mooring sites, and leisure navigation may have a negative impact on coastal fishery and fishing stocks. Increased use of the shoreline can lead to a reduction in sites accessible to fishing communities and loss of marine habitats (feeding, spawning and rearing grounds), as well as a decline in water quality and damage to the coastal environment.



Aquaculture, which is mainly practised in coastal waters and is linked to other aspects of policy such as urbanisation, tourism and agriculture, is a good example of how ICZM can ensure that coastal activities are mutually compatible. Fish farming can have a positive impact on coastal zones, as it demands good water quality and a clean environment.

Well-managed fish farms are a tourist attraction and supply fresh seafood for local restaurateurs. However, this activity can also be perceived to have a more negative side, in competing for limited water space and onshore development land or creating waste disposal and pollution problems.

Poorly conceived transport networks

The issue of transport poses some particularly complex problems for the EU's coastal regions. Without adequate connections they cannot reap the economic benefits of a thriving tourism industry or develop their local economies. Furthermore, inappropriate transport geared only to tourist fluxes may make access difficult for year-round residents. However, too many — or inappropriately designed — transport links can lead to problems of pollution and overcrowding, as well as habitat destruction.



The challenge for the Union's transport planners is to find a happy balance. Sadly, this balance between accessibility and the need to protect the local environment is struck all too rarely and transport planners have traditionally paid little heed to the very specific needs of coastal zones.

In recent decades, the problem of poor transport links has led people to move away from some of the Union's most remote coastal regions. This depopulation has been particularly marked on some of the Greek islands in southern Europe and in the archipelagos off the coast of Denmark and Sweden, for example.

At the other end of the scale, the Gulf of Naples in Italy has suffered partly from having many uncoordinated transport links. Local planners are now working to overcome Naples' problems of congestion, intensive tourism, pollution and poor management of its natural and cultural heritage.

Achieving what experts call 'sustainable accessibility' — in other words building effective transport systems that work in harmony with the local environment — will be a vital step in ensuring an overall improvement in the state of Europe's coastal zones. In order for this to happen, the various national bodies responsible for building transport infrastructure must work more closely with local stakeholders in coastal regions.



Increasing urbanisation

In recent decades more and more of the Union's coastline has become urbanised. While well-planned property development can play a role in ensuring coastal regions do not sink into economic decline, all too often the building bonanza along the Union's seaboard has happened in a haphazard manner.



One of the driving motors behind this urban sprawl has been a huge increase in the number of second homes built in EU coastal regions. Many of these houses remain empty for much of the year and are only used at weekends or during the holiday season. Yet they often destroy fragile natural habitats and prevent the general public from accessing local beaches. In addition, their waste disposal systems and septic tanks can overload the natural environment's ability to absorb pollutants.

The problem of coastal over-development is particularly acute in southern Europe where many second homes are illegal or 'semi-legal' and contravene local planning laws.

Erosion

In many of the EU's coastal zones, erosion by the sea is a natural process that has been going on for millions of years. In itself, the phenomenon poses few environmental dangers, but it has come to be regarded as a problem in zones where it threatens coastal towns and villages.

Trying to prevent erosion is an extremely complex task and it is not always easy to calculate what the long-term effects of human interventions in this natural process might be. Traditional 'hard' engineering works to prevent coastal erosion, such as concrete sea-breaks or dykes, are very expensive to maintain and do not always succeed in stopping land being washed away. In some areas, they have even accelerated the process. Major building work of any sort in areas susceptible to erosion can also make the problem worse.

On some parts of the Baltic Sea coast in Latvia for example, natural coastal erosion had been going on for several

thousand years at a rate of around 1.2 metres a year until a major harbour for oil tankers was built at Ventspil. Now the local coastline recedes by between 2.5 and 3.5 metres a year.

In many areas of the Union, national and regional authorities are beginning to realise that trying to stop natural erosion taking place by building walls is often a futile exercise. Instead some managers have opted for a policy known as 'managed retreat'. This involves gradually scaling down human activity in coastal areas that will one day end up being reclaimed by the sea. On the south-west coast of the UK's Isle of Wight for example, where the cliffs have receded by over 400 metres in the last 400 years, local businesses have adopted precisely this sort of pragmatic approach.

In regions where managed retreat is not a viable solution (for example, areas with a very high economic or historical value), many authorities have opted for 'soft' coastal defences rather than traditional sea walls or barriers. In areas that have not been overly developed, for example, replanting sand dunes with sea grasses and other indigenous vegetation can slow the erosion process quite effectively. The huge challenge over the coming years for policy-makers in these areas will be to formulate durable solutions that have as few unforeseen consequences as possible.



Pollution

Coastal zones face a double threat from pollution. Not only are they regularly victims of major maritime disasters, such as oil slicks or chemical spills, but they also suffer as a result of pollution generated inland that washes into the sea via streams and rivers.



Pollution from marine accidents is a particular problem in coastal zones that are near major international shipping routes. In general, marine transport is considered to be relatively environmentally friendly. But the problem with shipping is that when accidents do happen, the results are often catastrophic.

When the Maltese-registered oil tanker Erika sank off of the French coast in 1999 for example, the resulting oil slick caused a huge amount of environmental and economic damage. Oyster farms had to be closed, the number of tourists visiting French seaside resorts in affected areas fell dramatically, and thousands of kilometres of coastline were covered in foul-smelling crude oil.

In addition, it is often very difficult to establish who is to blame for maritime accidents. The companies that own oil tankers are frequently based in countries outside the EU's jurisdiction, and this makes bringing them to justice a drawn-out and complicated process. However, the European Commission has recently put forward a number of proposals to introduce preventive measures in this field.

Pollution from inland sources — especially farms and factories — is also a major problem for many coastal zones. Full-blown ecological disasters on the scale of the Romanian cyanide spill

that polluted much of the River Danube and Black Sea coast in 2000 are thankfully comparatively rare. But every day, large quantities of pollutants are washed onto Europe's beaches.

One of the biggest worries is nitrate contamination from agricultural fertilisers and animal excrement. Nitrates are a vital ingredient of all fertilisers and pose no particular problems for the environment when used sparingly. But when large concentrations of nitrates are washed into streams and rivers they feed algae, which multiply at an astonishing rate, choking other aquatic life. Increased quantities of algae in the sea are also unpleasant for swimmers in bathing areas. Better cooperation is needed between coastal stakeholders and the inland authorities responsible for industry, farming and other sources of pollution, in order to avoid these 'green tides'.

The EU's newly adopted directive on water quality (the 'water framework directive') addresses these problems of coastal pollution by taking a common sense but innovative approach based on individual river basins as the starting point for protecting the Union's water.





River basin management, or RBM, links up all the different national, regional and local stakeholders who have an impact on water supplies as they flow from mountain springs into lakes and rivers and into the sea.

The water framework directive aims to ensure that EU governments put in place coordinated measures for managing water use and tackling pollution, instead of the piecemeal policies often applied at the moment. This approach also includes the development of harmonised data collection and information supply using geographic information systems.

As far as coastal zones are concerned, the water framework directive will ensure that Member States take coherent steps to tackle all sources of pollution, whether from the land or the sea. The legislation gives governments a 15-year deadline for achieving good quality coastal waters, through coherent water quality policies based on RBM.

Habitat destruction

Coastal zones contain some of the Union's richest and most fragile natural habitats. These areas are often of particular ecological interest and include salt marshes, sand dunes and cliff sides that are home to numerous species of rare birds. But in many parts of the Union, coastal habitats are under threat.

Population increases and changes in economic activities are leading to alterations of the sea floor, beaches and shorelines. Urban expansion can also result in the destruction of important coastal habitats — particularly wetlands. This

urbanisation has caused certain animal species to die out completely in a number of coastal zones, and this permanent loss means the erosion of what environmental experts refer to as 'biodiversity'. They point out that it is often impossible to rebuild a coastal habitat once it is destroyed, and that even when restoration is possible, it is always an extremely complex and expensive procedure. Habitat loss can have a negative impact on water resource availability and on coastal erosion.

But unfortunately, some local and regional planners in the EU do not seem to think coastal habitat destruction is a problem. Demands to protect natural coastal habitats are sometimes viewed with suspicion by regional authorities eager to boost local trade by building more houses, roads, tourist developments and business premises. But habitat loss can also damage the economies of coastal zones. In areas that still have a strong fishing industry, for example, habitat destruction can damage fish stocks. The loss of areas of natural beauty also prevents coastal regions from developing businesses like eco-tourism and many outdoor leisure activities.



The solution — an EU-wide policy for coastal zones

Because the EU's coastal regions face such a wide variety of overlapping challenges from such a large number of different sources, the European Commission believes the Union needs a coordinated coastal policy.

In 2000, the Commission published an in-depth report in which it outlined plans for an integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) strategy for the Union. The report says that Europe's coastal zones could benefit from a number of EU-wide measures. But the Commission also argues that each of the EU's 15 Member States should develop its own national ICZM strategy.

Such national ICZM strategies would allow all the different policy-makers who have a say in the management of coastal regions within a country to coordinate their actions far more effectively. These national strategies would also aim to improve the compatibility of the many national sectoral laws and policies that affect the coastal zone, and would facilitate actions by local and regional authorities.

Local authorities are key actors in Europe's coastal regions. Only they — along with other on-the-ground stakeholders like businesses, local residents and non-governmental organisations — know the real problems facing their particular area. Regional bodies can provide the focus for coordinating local grass-roots initiatives, while national policies and programmes should provide the legal and institutional framework to facilitate the actions at the regional and local level.

The ICZM approach encourages decisions affecting coastal regions to be taken at the most appropriate level, but stresses that the different levels of administration need to act in





harmony. In many cases, it also calls for cross-border cooperation. For example, it would make more sense for countries sharing a coastline on the same sea to try to coordinate their activities, rather than putting in place a series of possibly conflicting national policies. The EU ICZM strategy encourages this sort of 'regional seas' approach to coastal policy in countries bordering the Mediterranean and Baltic, for example.

The ICZM strategy also aims to prevent policies that apparently have no bearing on coastal regions from damaging the seaboard unintentionally. In the case of agricultural pollution, for example, policy-makers in charge of the Union's common agricultural policy will become more aware of the impact of inland fertiliser use on coastal waters.

The Commission is already working to implement the EU-wide ICZM strategy through existing Union legislation and programmes. Meanwhile, EU governments and the European Parliament are currently considering the Commission's call for national strategies and it is hoped the new coastal policy will soon be fully in place.

This EU strategy for the coastal zones will be complemented by the Commission's sixth environment programme's emphasis on the importance of an effective territorial approach to environmental problems.

Main principles of ICZM



Main principles of ICZM

- Take a wide-ranging view of inter-related problems
- Base decisions on good data and information
- Try to work with natural forces
- Allow for unforeseen future developments
- Involve all stakeholders and all relevant parts of the administration
- Make use of a range of instruments (laws, plans, economic instruments, information campaigns, Local Agenda 21, voluntary agreements, promotion of good practices, etc.)

Try to see the big picture

One of the key principles of an effective ICZM policy is to look at the problems faced by coastal zones in the widest possible context.

In the past, many well-intentioned efforts to improve the state of the Union's coastal regions have failed because they have looked at issues in isolation. For example, the question of tourism in coastal zones cannot be addressed effectively without also considering a whole range of other issues. These include water supplies, land-use, employment and the impact of tourism on existing natural habitats.

Furthermore, in many parts of the Union, a single coastal zone can be criss-crossed by several administrative borders. This means coastal improvement policies are often very disjointed,

with different districts putting in place different and uncoordinated measures. In areas where a coastal zone straddles the frontier between two countries, these problems of coordination are even more acute. In addition, many of the problems facing coastal zones can have their origins many hundreds of kilometres away from the seashore.

In Strymonikos in Greece, for example, river-borne pollution from Bulgaria is affecting the quality of coastal waters.

All of these factors mean that an effective ICZM strategy must try to join up the many different actors who affect coastal regions and address the many different but interconnected problems that affect these areas.

Consider local conditions

The fact that the European Union has such a hugely varied coastline means that any effective ICZM strategy must be based on local solutions that suit local conditions. A policy designed to stop seawater seeping into the water table in Greece would be ill-suited to a coastal region on Sweden's





Baltic coast for example. The EU ICZM strategy is firmly based on the principle of 'subsidiarity', which states that important policy decisions should always be taken as close to the citizen as possible. This means that local stakeholders in the EU's coastal regions must be at the heart of ICZM, as only the people who live and work in coastal zones know the real challenges their particular regions face. It would not make sense, and nor would it be right, for national governments or the European institutions to try to impose uniform solutions on these regions from above.

What the higher levels of government can do, however, is to provide support and guidance to these local initiatives and ensure that the many national and EU policies that need to be implemented in the coastal zone are not contradictory. The national and EU administrations also need to ensure that sectoral policies are suited to the conditions of the coastal zones. Coordination between the policies at national and EU levels dealing with issues like water quality, habitat protection, transport, fishing and tourism should help to improve the lot of the Union's coastal zones. However, this can only happen if these policies are also implemented coherently at the local level.

In order to ensure that problems are solved on the basis of local needs, good planning and management in coastal zones also depends on accurate and sufficiently detailed information, collected in the Member States.



Work with nature

As the legend of King Canute (1) shows only too clearly, efforts to tame the sea almost always fail. This is why modern coastal management techniques try to work with nature rather than battle against it.

In the past, battles against the sea have sometimes ended up aggravating problems facing coastal zones rather than resolving them. For example, engineering works to improve port facilities in Aveiro in Portugal led to an increase in erosion of the adjacent shoreline because they disrupted local tidal flows, which had not been adequately considered in the planning phase. Subsequent moves to protect the coast using hard defences built of concrete and steel failed to improve the situation.

If the authorities in Aveiro had had more information about the natural processes at work in the region's coastal zones before they started building at the port, they could perhaps have prevented the extra erosion problems. This might also have cut the overall cost of the building works in the region. If more integrated thinking had been applied to the port project from the outset, it would probably not have been necessary to build the extra sea defences.

In Belgium, the authorities responsible for the heavily built-up Flanders coast are now trying to work more closely

(1) King Canute's followers said he was so powerful that the tides would turn back at his command. Not wishing to encourage unrealistic expectations of his capacities, the king had his throne placed among the waves and ordered the waves to stop — but of course they didn't.

with the natural dynamics of the coastal zone. Where possible the Belgian authorities are trying to adopt a less confrontational approach to managing the problem of erosion by removing hard sea defences and replacing them with more alternatives such as replanted sand dunes which naturally absorb the energy of the sea.

Think ahead, be adaptable

It is often extremely difficult to predict the precise problems a particular coastal region will face in the future. This is why ICZM is designed to be an evolving process, which not only deals with today's problems but also is flexible enough to adapt to as yet unforeseen issues that may arise in the future. Once a decision has been taken to build a new marina, for example, it will be very difficult to 'unbuild', even if later generations discover that the development is causing serious environmental damage.



Good coastal zone management should explicitly acknowledge the uncertainty of future conditions and promote flexible and adaptable policies. Good coastal zone planning and management should also be based on what is known as the 'precautionary principle'. This states that policy-makers should try to anticipate potential damage to coastal regions rather than waiting for things to go wrong before trying to put them right. The precautionary principle also states that policy-makers should err on the side of caution if they are not entirely sure whether a planned move would damage a coastal zone. This approach is particularly important in areas that face a potential threat from urban sprawl or major tourist developments.

As the risk of climate change mounts, it is likely that coastal zones will be facing new problems and challenges in the coming decades. We need to ensure that our planning and management systems are flexible enough to meet these new challenges as they arise.



Get everyone involved

ICZM is designed to increase contacts between sectors of government and between local, regional and national governments so that policy-makers can have a clear picture of the needs of Europe's coastal regions. But good coastal zone planning and management must also involve non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders if it is to be a success. ICZM simply will not work without regular input from the businesses, local people and non-governmental organisations that live and work in the Union's coastal zones.

Without the full participation of local stakeholders, coastal management strategies will never succeed. If people do not feel involved in decisions that affect their region, they can come to resent policy-makers and reject plans to improve coastal zones. In 1993, for example, local residents rejected a management plan for the Exe Estuary in the United Kingdom drawn up by a firm of consultants. The residents complained that the consultants had not asked them for their views on certain questions, particularly on issues related to charging estuary users for the provision of harbour services. This led policy-makers to rethink their whole strategy for the estuary and a series of local topic groups made up of local residents was set up. Following a broad consultation process, which included numerous local meetings, a new strategy for the region has been drawn up that everybody seems happy with. The residents still meet regularly to discuss local problems and have set up the Exe Estuary Forum to coordinate efforts to improve life in their coastal region.



Similar experiences across the Union show that it is vitally important for local stakeholders to be



involved in discussions about coastal zone policy from the outset. While local stakeholders must always be at the heart of any ICZM strategy, it is also important to ensure that all other actors who have an impact on a particular region are involved in efforts to improve the lot of coastal zones.

Often this means coordinating local initiatives with wider national policies in order to ensure that unintended conflicts between different levels of government do not arise. Local moves to reduce river-borne pollution in an estuary region would never be very successful unless the national authorities that regulate industrial and agricultural policy were involved, for example.

In some instances, it would also be necessary to coordinate local ICZM activities with European policies. This would be the case if a coastal zone were in an area designated as a protected region under EU habitat protection rules, for example. It also makes sense to ensure that European legislation on issues like agriculture, water quality and transport are properly integrated into local ICZM strategies.

Local actors, on their own, cannot solve the problems of the coastal zone. The challenges facing coastal zones do not arise in isolation, and without cooperation between all levels of government, ICZM simply will not work.

Conclusion — a pressing need for the EU coastal strategy

A coordinated EU-wide approach to coastal policy is needed to make sure that the problems currently facing our coastal regions do not get worse. Most projections show that the number of people using these areas is set to go on increasing for the foreseeable future.

If no steps are taken to manage these increased strains being imposed on coastal regions, problems like habitat loss, pollution and erosion will end up destroying some of the most beautiful, biologically rich and fragile areas in the EU, while coastal communities are torn apart by unemployment and social disintegration. The net result would be a major loss in the value of coastal zones and the destruction of economically valuable resources.

On the other hand, properly coordinated ICZM strategies at both the EU and national levels will allow the Union to reap the full benefits of its coastal regions and ensure they develop modern, vibrant economies while still protecting their unique natural beauty.



For ICZM to work it must be based on local solutions to local problems. Local stakeholders will always be at the centre of moves to improve the lot of coastal regions, but in order to ensure the best possible deal for coastal zones, there is a need to coordinate the activities of these grass-roots actors with regional, national and European policy-makers. ICZM will have short-term costs, but much greater medium and long-term benefits.

For centuries, Europe's coastal zones have suffered from poorly coordinated planning and inappropriate policy-making. But with a concerted effort to introduce ICZM across Europe, the tide could be about to turn.



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