



## Integrated approach needed to tackle coastal flooding

**A new study** outlines the challenges faced in securing Europe's coastlines against flood damage. The study highlights the importance of taking an integrated approach to coastal management which accounts for scientific, socio-economic and political factors, and considers the problem at local, regional and national levels, from the perspectives of all stakeholders.

**Coastlines are important** not only to those who live there or those who visit them as holiday destinations, but also to the fishing industry and for international trade. Much of Europe's coastline is under threat from erosion and flooding, which will only be exacerbated by rising sea levels caused by global warming.

The EU Directive on the Assessment and Management of Flood risks<sup>1</sup> requires Member States to assess the risk of coastal flooding, to map the flood extent and assets and humans at risk in these areas, and to reduce the risk. Flood risk management favours an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, for which the principles of the EU Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Recommendation can be used. Under the EU ICZM Recommendation regulation, national strategies are being developed that aim to protect European coastlines based on a cross-sectoral and participative approach.

The new study takes the Thames Estuary in the UK as a case study to explore different stakeholder perspectives on the concept of integrated coastal flood risk management. The authors of the study carried out in-depth interviews with six different stakeholders – ranging from a regional planning body and an association representing the UK's insurance industry, to charities and trusts involved in supporting the management of the estuary.

These perspectives were analysed to identify potential barriers and enabling factors in implementing an effective coastal flood risk management strategy. The findings reinforce the view that integration is key to managing the coastal environment into the next century.

The researchers found there was little incentive to develop new approaches to flood risk management, as money had already been invested in existing flood defence infrastructure and continues to be required for hard protective defences. Existing models of spatial development planning were also found to prevent progress. A new push towards more innovative solutions is needed that incorporates not just flood defences, but also strategic flood risk management approaches.

Another challenge for integration is overcoming resistance to participatory approaches to engaging with stakeholders. The interviewees were not clear about the reasons for engagement and there was also evidence of conflict between 'strong government' and participatory management. The researchers argue that the value of stakeholder engagement is in creating a fair decision-making process, rather than leading *automatically* to better quality decisions that emerge from the process. The findings demonstrate the need to address the complexities of the diverse interests and perspectives of stakeholder groups.

1. See [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/flood\\_risk/index.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/flood_risk/index.htm)

**Source:** McFadden, L., Penning- Rowsell, E., and Tapsell, S. (2009). Strategic coastal flood-risk management in practice: Actor's perspectives on the integration of flood risk management in London and the Thames Estuary. *Ocean & Coastal Management*. 52(12): 636-645.

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