



Coastwatch Press Release

Value, Protection & Management

COASTWATCH
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COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE
COASTWATCH POLICY INPUT TO THE IEN SHOW CASE 2009 MANSION HOUSE
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Imagine the coastal zone like a wide ribbon covering inshore waters and coastal land, folded and decorated to form inlets, lagoons and islands; rocky and soft shore coastal land. This ribbon > 6800 km long, contains the most productive and valuable hectares, with fish nurseries, shellfish beds, beaches, ports and highest value real estate. The ribbon continues across the border. We share riches and challenges with Northern Ireland.

Climate change is bringing sea level rise and more erratic weather, with dry periods and very heavy rainfalls and storms. Most coastal countries are now revising their coastal zone management to adapt to the predicted effects of climate change and to boost the resilience of their coastal 'ribbon'.

Coastwatchers have identified 5 key issues for politicians to address. There are urgent, even without climate change.

1. The Irish coastal zone remains in policy limbo with no coordinating office or interdisciplinary group to plan, advise on, or oversee cl change adaptation or CZM. Coastal information is all over of the place.

E.g. The WFD River Basin Management Plans which are about to be adopted contain virtually no information on coastal water bodies. They remain 'to be determined'. Potential for all Ireland CZM cooperation is not realised.

2. Some climate change mitigation (restoring carbon sinks like marshes) and adaptations are taking place at sectoral and local level, but in isolation, with no logical ranking of priorities, cost/benefit analyses, or dissemination of results.

E.g. In S. Wexford the OPW recently strengthened an old sea wall protecting extensive grazing land (> €1 million). A mile away Wexford county council has no budget to repair a similar sea wall protecting the coast road. The road is the only access to several houses.

3. Biodiversity especially wetlands in the coastal zone are dwindling and the rest coming under unprecedented pressure. Nature's ability to adapt to climate change is being cut instead of aided.

E.g.1: Waterford hb., an estuary heaving with biota, including cod nursery and cockle beds. Apart from dredging, prolonged fresh water exposure and silt loads are a serious threat to cockle survival, as demonstrated in mass cockle mortality in August 08. Lost floodplain wetlands could be restored as other countries are doing. We are planning to infill more.

E.g.2: The Japanese (or Gigas oyster) used in aquaculture was deemed to be unable to reproduce successfully in our colder waters. It is now an IAS in at least 3 of our estuaries. Gigas can form continuous mid-shore reefs, too sharp to walk on, where now we have a beach, or lugworm- flat fish heaven. (see also Coastwatch Native Oyster Campaign)

4. Laws, plans and projects which exasperate climate change and reduce our ability to adapt are alive and well.

E.g. 1 Estuarine marsh can still be drained without planning permission (Land Reclamation Act 1949 and Planning Act). The wetland bill (2002) to change this, is gone off the register!

E.g. 2 Sligo airport (55 min. drive from Knock Airport and close to the Sligo Dublin rail line) is to be extended into the sea. Rich protected coastal saltmarsh and mudflats - carbon sinks - are to be covered in tarmac to allow us to take more short distance flights. The public private partnership project costs are not just the €X to build and €Y to maintain hard erosion prone structures jutting out into the sea. Carbon sink loss, biodiversity loss and Green island image loss need to be added as we plan to build into another Natura 2000 and World Wetland Site.

5. Sustainable traditional uses of the coastal zone and local knowledge are being wiped out in favour of more intense and damaging uses.

E.g. 1: Traditional native oyster fisheries with men who have the most local knowledge are being lost in Lough Foyle and L. Swilly, while large grant aided boats with high energy consumption and demonstrated high impact are being supported in license and grants.

E.g. 2: Mullaghmore Co Sligo dune commonage is managed by local farmers to highest standards. Biodiversity is flourishing in sand hills which form natural erosion buffers and carbon sinks. This is taken for granted and not even recorded. However most of our dunes have been turned into golf links, car parks or housing. Perversely this new low biodiversity/high carbon footprint sand hill system is deemed to be of such high value that we the tax payer end up paying towards the hard erosion control to maintain it.

1. Create a top quality coastal zone management policy for Ireland, with special focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation by end of 2010

How? By review of earlier draft CZM policies, taking into account climate change predictions, new biodiversity plan, the wfd, the shellfish water and Natura 2000 site requirements and seeking to integrate with NI CZM policy. Relate to good practise in other countries and produce a draft for public comment by July 2010. Seek public comment including local libraries, around life guarded beaches and harbours in summer 2010. Redraft and publish as policy document to be adopted by government and implemented from 2011.

Who: Drafting work in either the Foreshore Section of DoE or as 'Coast Office' contract.

2. Create a central depository for climate change mitigation and adaptation information to disseminate knowledge and link actions

How? Start by opening a CZM and Climate change page on the ENFO website where both authorities and members of the public can contribute and browse information on flooding, erosion, local restoration and mitigation projects, biodiversity and climate change initiatives

Who: Enfo web master. Later depository could be in a 'Coast Office' coordinating CZM policy.

3. Stop wetland loss, celebrate our wetland wealth and functions

How? Dove tailed actions for both wetland area and their ecosystem services including:

- Reactivate the wetland bill 02 to ensure all wetland drainage requires planning permission and add a new section to ensure no hard erosion control or flood defence is approved without prior assessment of soft control, managed retreat and wetland restoration options.
- Ensuring the DoE wetland waste infill policy guidelines are fully enforced. All illegally infilled wetlands since Jan. 2008 should be verifiably fully restored, with land taken into public ownership to restore where owners plead inability.
- No new wetland infill or drain permission without at least equal prior wetland creation to take over ecosystem and flood control services. When restoring or creating think ecosystem, not box!
- Invasive alien species control law and enforcement (including no Gigas in native oyster areas)
- Wetland awareness raising campaign and full implementation of the Ramsar Convention.

Apart from wetland legislation and policy some horizontal legal and policy changes are urgent including...

4. Create transparency in coastal decision making, ensure timely access to information and public participation, as well as access to justice

These human and environmental rights must be guaranteed by all departments and official bodies dealing with the coastal zone to protect biodiversity and support wise use.

How? Much of this review should be ongoing subsequent to complaints from NGOs and losing the European Court case on access to justice in July 09. The review needs to be opened up so the public and coastal stakeholders especially.

Who: ideally coordinated in a trusted neutral forum like the Ombudsman's office.

5. Represent those with most knowledge about the local shores adequately in coastal planning, monitoring and enforcement

Traditional fishermen and shellfish pickers, farmers whose fields straddle the shore have knowledge and relevant skills which we must seek to use. Their potential to help monitor and manage protected sites and plan wise adaptation is enormous.

How? Include this action in Fisheries policy review, REPS revision, wfd and Natura 2000 site management decisions to create systems where local participation is valued and financially supported.

This Oct '09 policy statement is to challenge and help reform present decision making and use of our coastal zone. The summary is underpinned by substantial evidence around the coast of Ireland and through the Coastwatch network with other countries. We welcome comment and the opportunity to further these and related points. There is urgent need and scope for rapid results.

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