

Annual report for the Standing Conference on Problems Associated with the Coastline 2008/09

Introduction

The last year has been perhaps one of the most important in the lifetime of SCOPAC since its formation in 1986. SCOPAC has been actively involved in ensuring the successful restructuring of coastal risk management arrangements along the central south coast of England following the delegation by Defra to the Environment Agency of a 'Strategic Overview for flood and coastal risk management' in April 2008. As a result there has been considerable administrative activity for the group over the last year but, despite this, SCOPAC has continued to play a leading role in terms of investigation, research and dissemination on coastal issues.

Restructuring of SCOPAC

Following extensive consultations undertaken by Defra between 2004 and 2006 as part of its 'Making Space for Water' initiative, the Environment Agency was given a 'Strategic overview for flood and coastal risk management' from April 2008. The intention was to simplify the current relatively complex arrangements bringing coastal risk management under the control of one organisation which would work in close partnership with coastal groups and local authority coast protection authorities.

SCOPAC and its Officers' Working Group (now called the Southern Coastal Group) has played a very active role in assisting the implementation of this process in the most suitable and beneficial way to meet the requirements of those involved in management of the south coast.

With financial support from SCOPAC the chairman of the Officers' Working Group has developed new Constitutions for both SCOPAC and the Southern Coastal Group as well as new Terms of Reference, Business Plans and Action Plans. Furthermore SCOPAC received detailed presentations which have examined the implications of the implementation of the strategic overview, the historical context of SCOPAC, the value of the elected member role to SCOPAC, the respective future roles of SCOPAC and the Southern Coastal Group under the strategic overview, how coastal zone management is delivered in England, the development of new reporting and approval cycles for SCOPAC and the Southern Coastal Group, options for enlarging the scope of SCOPAC, the role of the Regional Flood Defence Committees in relation to coastal groups, the relationship between SCOPAC and the coastal fora (e.g. Solent Forum and Dorset Coastal Forum) and the Local Government Association Coastal Special Interests Group and new legal and administrative frameworks under which SCOPAC and the Southern Coastal Group would operate.

This work has resulted in the creation of a new structure whereby SCOPAC and the Southern Coastal Group continue to work in close partnership to their mutual benefit with SCOPAC retaining its key policy role including information-sharing and provision of guidance to its members as well as the commissioning of research, which is now delivered by the Southern Coastal Group on its behalf.

Research

Despite the administrative changes that have taken place, SCOPAC has continued to be actively involved in promoting research, which has been undertaken primarily through offices of the Southern Coastal Group. A major initiative this year has been the publication of an updated version of SCOPAC's 'Coastal risk management – A non-technical guide' which

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was launched at the House of Commons in April 2009. The new guide, which updates the earlier version published in 2004, has been distributed to all members of Parliament with coastal constituencies as well as other key national players in the coastal management field and all SCOPAC elected members and officers together with other local interest groups; a very positive response to the new guide has been received.

A study which has attracted particular interest this year has been the first phase of the 'extreme wave conditions study' which is being undertaken by Professor Bradbury of New Forest District Council. An interim presentation on this study was made to SCOPAC which resulted in significant discussion particularly in the context of climate change. SCOPAC has also contributed £10,000 towards the new edition of the CIRIA Beach Management Manual which is to be published early next year. This important publication will benefit from a launch along the south coast of England in order to maximise its value to SCOPAC's constituent members. The Environment Agency has supported SCOPAC through financial contributions towards the preparation by the chairman of the Southern Coastal Group of a four page leaflet illustrating 'How the Environment Agency and coastal groups are working together to deliver the strategic overview'. Alongside this a web-based map is being prepared which sets out the geographical extent of shoreline management plans and coastal defence strategy studies around the coastline of south-east England; the map can be interrogated to find up-to-date information on progress with these various studies. In parallel with this work the SCOPAC website has been substantially improved reflecting the administrative changes and describing the full range of SCOPAC's activities (www.scopac.org.uk).

In Spring 2008 SCOPAC members and officers attended a short technical field meeting to St Malo to inspect Europe's largest managed realignment scheme at the Bay of Mont St Michel. The visit illustrated how funded packages from different organisations can be combined to delivery large sustainable schemes that are of significant economic value to the local and regional economies as well as achieving biodiversity targets.

An important role for both SCOPAC and the Southern Coastal Group has been to support the delivery of the second round of shoreline management plans and alongside these SCOPAC has been interested to receive a presentation on the development of coastal erosion risk maps which will be launched in parallel with the SMP2s as they are published.

Presentations have been made on these subjects as well as other topics of interest to SCOPAC members including two by the chairman of Southern Coastal Group on comparisons between the approach to coastal risk management in England and France, and the study of how historical works of art can assist the understanding of long-term coastal change.

Administrative Changes

In September 2008 the Isle of Wight Council advised that it was no longer able to provide the secretarial and treasurer services for SCOPAC. Following discussions with Havant Borough Council, it commenced the secretarial role on 1 January 2009 and the treasurer role from 1 April 2009. As a result meetings, which had previously been held at the Guildhall, Portsmouth, have since taken place at Havant Borough Council offices. At the request of SCOPAC the Chairman of the Southern Coastal Group wrote to Portsmouth City Council to thank it for its longstanding support by providing meeting rooms over the last 23 years. The new arrangements supported by Havant Borough Council have been working extremely well both in terms of officer support and accommodation for SCOPAC.

In September 2008 the chairman, Captain A. J. Davies, stood down after many years of chairmanship of SCOPAC; his excellent service was acknowledged by a presentation at his last meeting. Councillor Roger Elkins from Arun District Council was unanimously appointed

as Chairman, with Councillor Mrs Jenny Wride appointed as Vice-Chairman. Councillor Elkins has overseen much of the work involved in the creation of the new SCOPAC as an important political voice for the south of England and in creating a sound relationship with its partner the Southern Coastal Group.

Deliverables achieved from Action Plan

1. Prepare, approve and adopt new Terms of Reference and Constitution for SCOPAC.
2. Publish an annual forward programme of meeting dates for SCOPAC
3. Maintain an up to date database of SCOPAC Contact details.
4. Continue to develop and improve the SCOPAC website.
5. Prepare an annual report and business plan.
6. Arrange early meetings with the RFDC Chairman and EA officers to discuss coast protection input to Regional Flood Defence Committees.
7. Maintain firm links with the Solent and Dorset Coastal Fora and the LGA Coastal Special Interests Group.
8. Continue to support technical field meetings and conferences where appropriate.
9. Support the successful completion of Round 2 SMPs and Strategy Studies.
10. Oversee the successful completion of the SCOPAC research programme.
11. Launch SCOPAC Guide to Coastal Risk Management.