

How do we manage coastal risks? – Launch of new SCOPAC ‘Non-technical guide’ at the House of Commons – Wednesday 22nd April 2009.

Embargo until Monday 20th April 2009

With over 150 organisations involved in the management of our coastline together with coastal residents, landowners and businesses, there is enormous interest in how coastal risks such as erosion, flooding and instability can be managed in a sustainable way, particularly in the face of climate change.

The Standing Conference on Problems Associated with the Coastline (SCOPAC) is a partnership comprised of coastal local authorities, the Environment Agency, Natural England and other key organisations interested in successful management of risks along 700km of the coastline of central southern England between Lyme Regis in Dorset and Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex. Established in 1986, SCOPAC was the first ‘Regional Coastal Group’ created to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is adopted along the coastline and that the activities of one local authority do not adversely affect the coastal frontages of its neighbours. This approach has led to the recognition of SCOPAC as one of England’s most effective coastal partnerships.

With financial support from its thirty strong membership, SCOPAC has commissioned over £1 million worth of sub-regional coastal research over the last twenty-three years, including the publication, in 2004, of an eighty page ‘Non-technical guide to coastal defence’.

An updated and substantially revised version of the Guide, with particular emphasis on the management of coastal risks, is being launched at the House of Commons on Wednesday 22nd April to an audience of coastal MPs, scientists and representatives of key organisations with an interest in the coast.

The Chairman of SCOPAC, Councillor Roger Elkins from Arun District Council in West Sussex, said “there have been rapid advances in our understanding of coastal issues in recent years, for example, how the coastline is evolving, the mechanisms of erosion, sediment transport and deposition, environmental issues, as well as the impacts of climate change and sea level rise. These quite complex subjects are explained in SCOPAC’s new guide in a way that can be readily understood by those people who live and work along the coast but who are not necessarily technical specialists.”

The new guide has been written by Dr Robin McInnes OBE, Chairman of SCOPAC’s Technical Officer Group since 1995, who also wrote the first edition of the Guide. Dr McInnes said “this new guide provides the latest thinking on coastal evolution and natural processes, the coastal environment as well as the nature and scale of coastal risks and how they can be managed. I am delighted that SCOPAC has, once again, supported the publication of this Guide. The Guide has also benefitted from

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funding from the Environment Agency, which now has a 'Strategic Overview' for both flood and coastal erosion risk management in England'.

'SCOPAC is most grateful to Andrew Turner, MP for the Isle of Wight, for agreeing to host our launch at the House of Commons. We regard the transmission of up to date information on the management of coastal risks to our coastal Members of Parliament as a key part of SCOPAC's strategy for raising interest and awareness in coastal issues.'

For more information about SCOPAC and the new Guide please visit www.scopac.org.uk

Enquiries:

- Councillor Roger Elkins, Chairman of SCOPAC; telephone: 01903 505181
E-mail: roger.elkins@btinternet.com
- Dr Robin McInnes OBE. Telephone: 01983 854865; E-mail: rgmcinnes@btinternet.com

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Note for editors

The coastline of Great Britain has been progressively developed in recent centuries. Coastal zones not only make a very significant contribution to the economic well-being of the country but also provide opportunities for relaxation, recreation and enjoyment within a diverse range of outstanding natural environments. Over the last ten years considerable efforts have been made to encourage improved coastal management and this has led to the development of national strategies for the coast in support of the principle of sustainable development. As part of this process thorough consideration must be given to natural hazards, and the resulting risks to people, property and the environment. Risk management strategies for vulnerable areas provide a framework for addressing hazards arising on the coastline from marine erosion, flooding and landsliding.

Climate change is with us now and is going to exert an increasing influence on the lives of coastal and inland residents over the next decades by affecting the severity of coastal erosion, flooding and landslide events. Many climate impacts, particularly the most damaging ones, are likely to be associated with an increased frequency or intensity of extreme events. This is an important area for further research since many studies do not explicitly take into account the effects of extreme conditions, although it is known that such events pose significant risks. Climate change is imposing increasing pressures on certain coastal locations, and, as a result, is necessitating changes in our approach to the management of risks. It is recognised that it is impossible and, indeed, undesirable to defend all parts of our coastline and the development of risk management strategies to help ensure wise coastal decision-making must be based upon a thorough understanding of coastal evolution and natural processes.

Recently an initiative by the government (Defra) has led to a restructuring of responsibilities for addressing coastal risks. For the first time one national organisation has overall responsibility for both flood defence and coast protection. With its 'Strategic overview for coastal risk management' the Environment Agency, and local authorities who have held long-standing powers to carry out coast protection works, will be working together more effectively in accordance with national standards and guidance, to meet the challenges arising from climate change, looking ahead for the next one hundred years.

The Standing Conference on Problems Associated with the Coastline (SCOPAC) is an influential network of local authorities and other key organisations with an interest in coastal risk management. Established in 1986 SCOPAC's role has been to assist local authorities and others along the south coast of England in developing a more co-ordinated approach in this field, and, by commissioning research and sharing information, ensuring that a sustainable approach is developed to coastal risk management.

SCOPAC was concerned that although significant advances have been made in recent years, which were appreciated by those directly involved and within related professions, this level of understanding had always not been disseminated to non-technical decision-makers and other interest groups, who are required to make decisions about the coast on a day-to-day basis. Such stakeholders include politicians, businesses – both commercial and tourism-orientated, and local residents. Issues such as the predicted impacts of climate change including sea level rise, important environmental legislation and a better knowledge of coastal systems had not been explained in a non-technical manner. There was, therefore, a divide between the knowledge and expertise of the professionals, and that of others who wished to learn more about risk management in the coastal zone.

SCOPAC essentially provides a political voice for the coast in southern England and supports the work of the Southern Coastal Group which helps to deliver the Environment Agency 'Strategic Overview for flood and coastal erosion risk management along the south coast.

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The first edition of the SCOPAC guide was published in 2004 in order to explain current thinking in relation to coastal defence in an informative way using illustrated examples of current approaches to addressing coastal problems. The guide was welcomed by coastal stakeholders, but since then significant advances and policy changes have been made in terms of assessing and managing coastal risks. As a result, SCOPAC decided to publish an updated edition of its 'Non-technical guide'.

The development of a sustainable approach to coastal risk management can only be achieved through consensus between all the organisations and interests involved, including the general public. Such a participatory approach can be achieved most effectively if key issues are explained clearly in a non-technical language; this is the challenge that this latest SCOPAC guide seeks to address.

The risks posed by coastal erosion and flooding by the sea are becoming increasingly recognised by the public. Historically some developments have taken place in vulnerable coastal locations and this has increased the risks to both commercial development and residential properties. This new guide explains the significant advances that have been made in recent years in terms of improving both the policy framework and the structural arrangements for delivery of sustainable coastal risk management. It is hoped that our new guide will provide an interesting and informative reference source for all those involved in the management of natural risks within the coastal zone.

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