

An analysis of actor collaboration in the Regional Flood and Coastal Committees

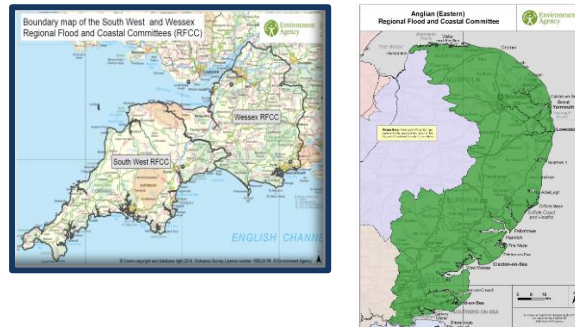
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Executive Summary

Research was carried out in 2014 by the universities of Exeter and East Anglia to identify the degree to which the Regional Flood and Coastal Committees provide a collaborative approach to flood and coastal management at local level through the involvement of local actors. Findings of the research show that generally, actors were supportive of the Committee process and felt that local level interests were – to an extent – integrated into decision-making. However, some considered the process top-down and in need of, albeit limited, modification. The research uncovered only limited evidence of structured mechanisms to inform local communities on RFCC flood management initiatives or work programmes in the two regions studied. Interestingly, Committee members in both regions expressed similar views on the Committee structure, processes and level of local influence.

Introduction and background

Two RFCCs, Anglian (Eastern) and the South West Region (Devon and Cornwall) were used as case studies to evaluate the extent of local actor influence on flood investment decisions. The two regions differ



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geographically and have different flooding and coastal issues. Low-lying East Anglia faces increasing risks from coastal flood inundation linked to erosion and sea-level rise and coastal areas were significantly affected by the December 2013 surge. The South West is susceptible to both coastal and river flooding, and bore the brunt of the 2014 winter storm flooding.

The Committees have statutory functions and bring together members appointed by the Lead Local Flood Authorities with independent members who have relevant experience. The Committee Chairs are appointed by DEFRA; the Lead Local Flood Authorities appoint Members, and the Environment Agency appoints the remaining independent members through an open selection process. These members are appointed as individuals, in part according to their expertise, not as

representatives of others or of other organisations.

Research design and methods

The research was based on a multi-case approach, using qualitative 'elite' interviewing of RFCC members in the South West and Anglian (Eastern) Regions. The interview programme was designed to elicit responses from RFCC members about their roles, the decision making process, and their perceived influence within the Committee structure.

Key findings

- Respondents expressed positive comments about Committee Chairs, meetings, and Environment Agency staff;
- Committee members were genuinely committed to contributing to flood management issues;
- The Committees were the key conduit in ensuring that all risk management authorities worked together;
- The Committees enabled networking opportunities but there was limited two-way communication and knowledge exchange beyond the Committee process;
- The Chairs were keen to promote Committee decision-making; however there was no public relations mechanism for notifying communities about the work of the Committees.

Recommendations

- Formalise horizontal networking and a programme of exchange visits in local and other UK regions to foster sharing of best practice;
- Implement training programmes for non-agency members on funding allocation and decision-making procedures to improve members' understanding of procedures;
- Increase the use of sub-committees at an earlier stage of the funding decision process in order to integrate environmental and other concerns of local significance;
- Publicise Committee meetings and programmes of work more widely to improve engagement with local communities.

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