

Answers to your questions...



Essex Oystermen

Q Why do we need another strategy?

A Following on from the recommendations of the Essex Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) and the Essex Sea Wall Management Strategy (ESWMS) a need was identified for greater understanding of how the estuaries work today and how the estuaries will be affected by sea level rise and other changes in the future. Hydrodynamic modelling will address these issues and assist us in determining the future flood defence management of the estuaries in a strategic way. The use of techniques such as managed realignment will help manage future effects of climate change while at the same time replacing lost intertidal habitats. These strategies also bring together recommendations of the recent Coastal Habitat Management Plan. The strategies aim to provide a sustainable approach to flood defence for the future encompassing social, economic and environmental issues.

Q If sea levels are rising why don't you just simply raise the defences?

A There are over 300km of seawall in Essex and if stretched out in a straight line the defences would stretch from London to the English/Scottish border. These were all improved or raised following the 1953 floods where there was significant loss of life and property. Many of these walls today are expensive to maintain and have low economic benefit in terms of what they protect and the expenditure needed to maintain them. Saltmarsh is a natural flood defence and has been declining in significant amounts reducing the natural protection afforded to our coast. Realigning in strategic places, such as estuaries, enables us to manage surge events like 1953 better. Tidal water is diverted sideways onto the realignment site and reduces surge water height travelling up the estuary. It will be increasingly costly to raise defences everywhere. It will

also be impossible to replace lost intertidal habitat, with the result that the estuary conservation value would deteriorate with time as would its natural ability to reduce wave and tidal energy.

Q Does this mean you will stop protecting people and property from flooding?

A No, we will continue to provide sufficient protection and will maintain a line of defences where it is economically or environmentally justified. We believe there are places, however, where we can set back the defences and carry out our work more efficiently without major impact on people or property and at the same time provide intertidal habitat to replace losses resulting from sea level rise and other changes in natural processes. We want a balanced approach, keeping defences where they are needed and moving them where doing so will reduce overall cost and result in a more sustainable and manageable estuary.

Q What will happen to people who own the land?

A At present we are looking at the example set by the Humber Shoreline Management Plan, whereby landowners have been invited to sell land at strategic points along the estuary where managed realignment was deemed advantageous, for the overall benefit of the estuary. In these situations the Environment Agency would hope to purchase land ourselves and in partnership with other organisations, with the agreement of the land owner. For landowners that do not wish to sell but would consider managed realignment on their land there is the option of payments through the Intertidal Habitat Stewardship Scheme. If we cannot achieve a sustainable estuary shape through these means, it may become necessary to rely on the Environment Agency's statutory powers which include powers of compulsory purchase.



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Q Who will pay for the work?

A We will pay for the work from the flood defence budget with support from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Local Flood Defence Committee (LFDC). In some cases we will also seek support through our Regional Coastal Partnership agreement, with organisations like English Nature, National Trust, Wildlife Trust, RSPB and local wildfowling groups to assist in meeting our Habitats Directive and Biodiversity Action Plan requirements.

Q I like the estuary as it is now, why do you need to change it?

A The estuary today is already undergoing change as a result of erosion due to sea level rise and coastal squeeze. To maintain the estuary interests such as sailing, fishing and wildlife for the future and for future generations we must act now to help the estuary help itself.



Photo: Cornwall



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