

Case study: The coastal based approach

Natasha Bradshaw, Bob Earll, Peter Barham, Amy Pryor and Mark Everard analyse a way of enabling systematic collaboration and integrated delivery.

This article outlines a proposed approach to coastal governance in the UK that brings together public bodies, private-sector interests and coastal communities to offer better oversight and stewardship of coastal and marine resources. Governance of the coast is quite unlike the terrestrial environment because it requires the management of both marine and terrestrial environments and activities within them, many crossing this conceptual boundary and providing connections between people and the sea.

OCEAN AND COASTAL CONNECTIONS

People's appreciation and respect for the ocean depends upon their realisation of their connection to and benefits from it. For most people, this means being able to access, enjoy and understand it from the coast. The coast is a highly interconnected landscape and seascape, with a diverse mix of land ownership and governance. Coastal ecosystems contain valuable habitats and species and provide important ecosystem services. At the same time, the coastal zone often has a high population density and is visited and enjoyed by many more people, providing health and wellbeing benefits. Coasts often attract intensive investment in development, such as housing, ports, recreational and transport infrastructure. Estuarine systems in particular are often heavily encroached and converted for development.

Economic competition for space between diverse and legitimate interests places multiple stressors on the coastal and ocean ecosystem. If these pressures are not well balanced, public access and enjoyment can be compromised and ecosystem health can deteriorate. At the same time, social deprivation is also an issue in many coastal towns: their dependence upon tourism often results in a high proportion of seasonal work and lack of stability. Coastal communities are on the frontline of climate change, facing increased risks from the impact of storms and sea-level rise, with some serious challenges and choices about future management priorities to be faced.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The management of coastal issues poses a set of interconnected challenges quite unlike those on land. The number and diversity of public- and private-sector interests is often highest in the coastal zone, with a proportionate increase in the complexity of planning and management in this highly contested space. It is increasingly recognised that the sustainable management of our coastal infrastructure and natural assets is required alongside improving coastal community resilience to natural hazards, posing complex systemic challenges. Frequently, management approaches are dominated by either inland or offshore perspectives, with the coast often lacking a specific focus and the resources and capacity to be effectively managed.

Despite these challenges, there are huge opportunities for improvement. Seasonal revenue from recreation and tourism could be better managed alongside the potential for blue (maritime industry) growth, with revenues retained locally to provide better services for deprived coastal communities. At the same time, nature-based solutions to shoreline resilience could offer multiple benefits for coastal recreation and tourism, bringing health and wellbeing benefits to coastal populations and visitors – quality-of-life benefits from being near water are increasingly known as 'blue health'. Coastal regeneration and coastal habitat restoration could go hand in hand to offer mitigation and

adaptation opportunities to climate change. A new approach that focuses on the land–sea interface, encouraging coastal communities to take a real role in how the coast is managed, will help to ensure the longer-term resilience of the coastal ecosystem and the socio-economic benefits derived from it.

GOVERNANCE BEYOND SILOS

A plethora of organisations and designations have arisen in an *ad hoc* way over many years to govern different coastal resources. Many organisations operating conventional land and sea management policies are set up in a historical context, operating in top-down, discipline-specific silos. These traditional approaches originate from a command-and-control paradigm that has led to decision-making being top-down, expert-driven and imposed. This is often combined with the consideration of issues in isolation, which tends not to take full account of: the complexity of natural systems; the interactions, opportunities and trade-offs across different sectors and scales; and the range of values and needs of the coastal community. Hence, opportunities may be missed that could otherwise positively impact all members of communities and maximise budgetary efficiencies through integrated approaches.

Coordination and collaboration are needed across scales, sectors and levels of government. A flexible and enabling approach is needed to transition and influence understanding and management of complex natural systems while taking into account local and regional scales. A more inclusive approach that recognises differing stakeholder groups as well as the spatial scales of impact can grow shared capability, better informing a more flexible, adaptive management. A transition away from the current narrowly discipline-bound and top-down norms would impose a shift from government to governance: public, private and civil-society sectors would work in partnership to establish more collaborative governance. Importantly, this would not require any changes to the current legislation, but would require measures, potentially including incentives, to facilitate changes in approach and the growth of collaborative partnerships.

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Collaborative governance is an arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders and citizens in informal, cooperative decision-making, also linking with other agencies likely to be affected by management decisions. Collaborative governance provides opportunities for identifying how to:

- Bridge the gaps in the overlaps of existing legislation and policy;
- Capture synergies and minimise trade-offs; and
- Promote cross-sectoral alignment in a forum for deliberation by interdependent stakeholders.

The UN 2021–2030 Decade on Ecosystem Restoration recognises coastal ecosystems as a foundational resource vital for the achievement of outcomes across linked policy areas. There are many practical examples of effective partnerships and models of collaboration networks in different sectors. They can enable collaborative action on a project basis or local place-based issues, which generate a wide range of benefits enabling an integrated, values-based and cross-sectoral approach. If well delivered, these types of collaboration can also be particularly effective at breaking down barriers between organisations and delivering effective communications between stakeholders and communities. Current examples include catchment partnerships, marine planning partnerships, local enterprise partnerships, coastal/estuary partnerships and natural capital pioneers.

THE COASTAL BASED APPROACH VISION

The coastal based approach (CoBA) is a simple idea: to establish local and regional partnerships collectively covering the entire English coast that will support integrated place-based delivery for coastal ecosystems and communities. It offers a vision to strengthen and provide a systematic and

flexible approach to enable leadership through collaborative, integrated, place-based and inclusive governance. It offers a solution to support the monitoring, management and restoration of coastal ecosystems and adaptive management under changing climate conditions.

CoBA is based upon the experience of UK coastal partnerships over recent decades, and supported by evidence from the catchment based approach (CaBA) over the past decade. CaBA is an approach facilitated by the Environment Agency that hosts partners for the delivery of catchment partnerships, with action plans for every English river catchment to address land use and water issues. It has shown that, for every £1 directly invested by the government, CaBA partnerships have mobilised over £3 from other sources.

Both coastal and catchment partnerships provide a supportive framework for collaborative working at the scale of the catchment, or with a focus on the coast around locally identified issues and potential multi-beneficial solutions. CoBA would assist government with the delivery of legal and policy responsibilities and related programmes in a locally nuanced and integrated manner better supported by local communities. CoBA partnerships would have no legal duties or executive role – those would remain with statutory partners.

BUILDING ON COASTAL PARTNERSHIPS

To address local needs, there is already an array of community-based coastal partnerships in over 50 locations around the UK coast. These coastal partnerships support statutory agencies with policy delivery and encourage the engagement of coastal communities in decision-making. Their coverage is fragmented and some are financially fragile, but there is a huge amount of experience within them that can benefit the wider roll-out of CoBA. They demonstrate significant local impact, delivering benefits to society, the environment and the economy. Consequently, they provide a platform to support the delivery of CoBA. Their geographical remit could be extended and, with a secure base, they will stimulate more funding to enable delivery of a wide range of initiatives. This will realise interconnected benefits to coastal communities and deliver government objectives around the whole coastline.

BENEFITS TO GOVERNMENT

CoBA will deliver collaborative governance for the entire English coast, strengthening existing coastal partnerships and filling the gaps where no partnerships currently exist. Full coverage of this approach will ensure that communication and joint working is strengthened between government agencies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations and all sectors: port/harbour authorities, utility companies, the renewables industry, tourism associations, fishing clubs, recreation user groups, etc. It will ensure that every coastal community is better connected into governance, and develops a stronger sense of stewardship. It offers a consistent national delivery framework with regional and local flexibility according to need, and provides an umbrella for delivering cross-government policy at the local level.

By providing a platform for collaboration, CoBA partnerships will provide clear benefits to government and its agencies in the delivery of a wide variety of policies and programmes. Direct local input will help to ensure effective and long-lasting delivery, as will working with local authorities and bridging the links across community networks through a place-based approach to decision-making.

At the time of writing, in England the government (and its arm's-length bodies) have a range of ambitious coastal/marine initiatives. CoBA will assist in the delivery of green recovery, net zero targets, the restoration of marine biodiversity and the levelling-up agenda on jobs and resilience. This will include the 25 Year Environment Plan targets, the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management

Strategy, marine plans, shoreline management plans and the achievement of good environmental status, amongst others. Strengthening communication between stakeholders and within coastal communities will provide a unified voice to support the delivery of government policies and programmes, maximising opportunities for multiple benefits. By investing in local capacity, it will mobilise cooperation between stakeholders, communities and government.

DELIVERY

To deliver CoBA across the entire English coast, it is proposed that the UK government champion the launch and trial of CoBA (as they did with CaBA in 2011). For a modest investment, the government could leverage a large return for the economy, the environment and society. The proposal for a CoBA across England will help to ensure that the benefits of partnership working are harnessed, sustained and strengthened. A CoBA Steering Committee has been established, with membership from the public sector, industry, charity and academic interests, to promote the proposal widely.

Mapping is proposed to evaluate the gaps in the overlaps between existing partnerships, policy areas and existing collaborative initiatives. A call for trial locations has been issued, with interest expressed from all regions. Suggested match funding of local partners' contributions by central government would lever stronger local engagement in many areas of policy delivery, by supporting local partnership officers to facilitate engagement. The returns on investment would be monitored through a new evaluation scheme and by facilitating the sharing of best practice across the UK through the national Coastal Partnerships Network. This would also strengthen skill sharing and training to improve coastal knowledge amongst practitioners and policy officers. Importantly, it would also strengthen the next generation of decision-makers to embed resilience into coastal communities and protect people's connectivity to and respect of the ocean.

LOOKING AHEAD

There is a need for a more coherent approach to coastal governance based on our extensive understanding of collaborative working. CoBA would provide flexible, inclusive and effective leadership for some of the most challenging, complex and often neglected areas at the coast. It would support the delivery of government policy while building resilience into pre-existing community-led structures, providing local capacity to cover areas that are currently not represented. It will assist existing and new local coastal partnerships, many of which have grown organically, to achieve their full potential and provide national consistency along the entire English coast. CoBA will set out the need for defined coastal units so as to fill the gaps. The benefits of collaborative working will be quantified, along with the value of resourcing local co-ordinators and mobilising national coordination.

As we approach COP26 in November 2021, and begin to respond to obligations under the 2021–2030 UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the UK's partnership approach to managing the coast can demonstrate the cutting edge of coastal management globally. Furthering the UK's experience through the coastal based approach will provide a mechanism for local engagement and delivery of national and global objectives to support climate adaptation and ocean recovery.

The full CoBA proposition paper outlines the vision for CoBA and further information on how it would support delivery of government policy and programmes. For further information and contact see www.coastalbasedapproach.org

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