

Theme 15: Coast & the Maritime Environment

A Sustainable Future
for the South West



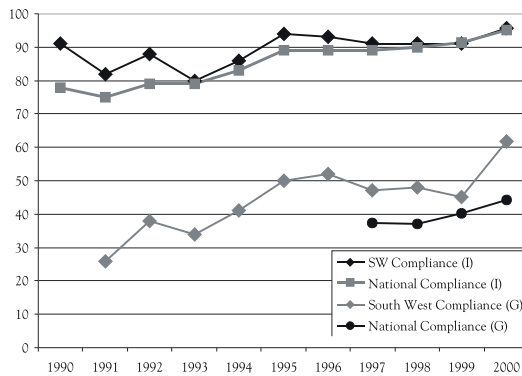
The Regional Sustainable Development Framework
for the South West of England



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Headline Indicator: Bathing water quality



Setting the scene

The South West is a truly maritime region. The ratio of coastline to land area is the highest of any region. The coast provides the principal economic focus of the region; many of the region's principal urban areas, including Bristol, Plymouth, Weston-Super-Mare, Exeter and Bournemouth/Poole, are coastal. Bristol is one of the UK's largest commercial ports, Plymouth is the UK's largest naval base, and Falmouth claims over 60% over the country's ship-repair. Although a relatively small employer in regional terms, fishing dominates the identity of most small coastal settlements and Newlyn has the UK's highest value of fish landings. It is estimated that for every person employed in fishing, another 3.5 jobs are in distribution and processing.

The coast is the prime driver of the region's tourist industry, attracting over 4 million visitors per annum. The contribution of the coast to the region's economy has never been quantified, however the marine related sectors that contribute 5% of the nation's GDP are highly represented in the South West. In addition, the quality of the environment and by definition the coast, is a prime driver of economic investment.

The coast of South West has one of the richest natural, cultural and landscape heritages in Europe. 60% of the country's Heritage Coast is located in the South West and the National Trust owns over 255 miles of coast in the region. In Cornwall alone the Trust owns 40% of the total length of the coastline. The coastal and marine areas of the South West support some of the richest habitats in the world - the region's waters marking a boundary between warm southern and cool northern areas creating an abundance of different species. This richness is reflected in the UK's highest number of coastal and marine Special Areas of Conservation, part of Europe's Natura 2000 network, and all but two of the country's Voluntary Marine Nature Reserves are located in the South West.

The region's islands deserve special mention as one of the region's greatest environmental assets, including the remote archipelago of the Isles of Scilly and the Lundy, England's only Marine Nature Reserve. The Dorset and East Devon Coast is currently being put forward for inclusion on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites, recognising its outstanding natural and geological value.

Water quality is high throughout the region, with all but one estuary in the region being classified as "good" by the Environment Agency. There are 185 designated bathing waters (over 405 of the national total) in the South West. The quality of these consistently exceeds the national average (Environment Agency 1999).

The region is an international centre of excellence in the understanding of the marine environment with an estimated 70% of the UK's marine biologists and 50% of oceanographers.

What are the opportunities for improving sustainability?

Maintaining the partnership of interests
The continued high quality of the region's coast is the result of a very strong partnership of interests. All sectors on the coast now recognise their mutual interdependence and the importance of maintaining the quality of the coastal and marine environments. Partnership activity to manage coastal and marine resources is high in the region including partnerships to sustainably manage the region's estuaries and Voluntary Marine Nature Reserves. The Dorset Coastal Forum and the Atlantic Living Coastline's were major contributors to the European Demonstration Programme on the management of the Coastal Zone.

Exploiting the economic potential
The DTI's Marine Foresight Panel identified the potential of marine related industries for future growth, particularly in the application of new technologies to navigation, ship design, marine recreation and oceanography. The region's diverse range of marine related enterprises, diverse coastal environment and body of knowledge and facilities provide a base on which to develop this potential.

Clean Energy
The coastal environment offers further unrealised opportunities for the generation of clean energy sources. The South West peninsula has some of the country's highest tidal ranges and consistent and highest wind and waves. The challenge will be to develop this potential without damage to the region's natural and landscape resources.

Knowledge and expertise

The region's powerful body of marine knowledge and expertise - in research and academic establishments, in the coastal community, in local government, NGO's and other agencies - provides an opportunity through improved communication to improve the both quality of the marine environment and the region's intellectual capacity. The South West is a stronghold of volunteer activity on the coast as demonstrated by the development in the region of the volunteer groups for issues ranging from marine safety to marine conservation.

The marine environment is one of the region's greatest undiscovered "treasures" with potential for innovative forms of tourism and education - as demonstrated by the popularity of various visitor-orientated marine centres in the region.

Marine transport

The emphasis on short sea shipping in national and European transport policy could provide opportunities for many of the region's ports. The region's long road supply lines could provide opportunities for the movement of bulk materials in particular.

Improving the quality and extent of coastal and marine habitats

Although the region has a high level of protected coastal and marine habitats, their value to the region could be further enhanced by increased resources for the management of existing and future areas. Coastal cliff-land is particularly well protected and managed by the National Trust and will be a continued target. However the estuarine and marine environment will require new and innovative measures to ensure its sustainable management. These measures could range from formal designations to the local management of fisheries their success will rest on the use of local partnerships between the many interest groups. In particular the region could take a lead in demonstrating the synergy between the sustainable management of fisheries and nature conservation through schemes such as "No Take Zones" and the Marine Stewardship Council certification.

Marine fisheries opportunities

The future of the offshore sector depends on the long-term survival of fish stocks which is dependant on decisions made in Westminster and Brussels. Harvesting any natural resource in a sustainable way (i.e. long-term) involves allowing the stock to maintain its population through a balance between that being caught by fishing, eaten by predators, or dying naturally, and offspring being born and growing to maturity. This balance needs to be agreed and then sustained between those involved in the industry, scientists and environmentalists. There may be an

opportunity to promote more processing of fish into value-added products locally. There may be a role for the RDA to look at assistance they could provide.

Enhancing the region's coastal and marine culture

The region's long association with the sea is a fundamental part of the regional distinctiveness and quality of life. We have inherited a rich cultural heritage legacy; ranging from defence, port and communications structures, to local traditions and international arts movements. The coast is still an important component of contemporary culture in the region either directly as an inspiration for fine arts and crafts, or as part of distinctive lifestyles based around surfing, sailing or more passive recreational use of the coastal environment

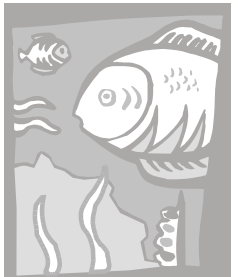
Maintaining the dynamic nature of the coast

Our coast is literally the front line in dealing with impacts of climate change such as increased storminess and rising sea levels. The challenge will be to find ways in which we can work with natural processes in response to such changes. "Hard" engineering solutions will have a place, but more important will be working with natural, dynamic coastal processes. "Soft" natural defences such as salt marshes and sand dunes have a value both as natural defences and natural habitats. There is also evidence that climate change will lead to significant changes in marine and coastal species and habitats in the South West, creating both opportunities and problems for coastal communities.

Improving water quality

Massive investment in sewage treatment in the region has produced tremendous dividends in improving the quality of coastal waters. Further improvements are still possible through the reduction and removal of "diffuse" pollution from other sources including farming. Pilot projects on the river catchments have demonstrated that significant reductions can be achieved for relatively modest investment. Benefits from further improvements would result in improved habitats, conditions for fisheries and shellfisheries as well further securing bathing water quality.

Ironically, the combination of intense historic pollution of the river and coastal environment in Cornwall and Devon by metalliferous mining, along with the considerable body of mining expertise, provides an opportunity to develop new techniques for the amelioration of modern pollution risks.



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What are the objectives for improving sustainability in the South West?

Objective	Examples of how it might be achieved	Links to potential partners and processes
Develop and support cross sectoral partnerships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Establish a SW Standing Conference on the Coast. 2 Establish Regional Seas partnership with partner regions in Ireland, S Wales and France. 3 Support partnerships for coast & waters of strategic regional natural and economic importance eg. Severn, Tamar, Poole Harbour, Lyme Bay. 4 Support voluntary coastal management through a programme of Voluntary Marine Conservation Areas and No Take Zones 	Regional Assembly GOSW, SWRDA, RPC Partner regions, Local Fora Voluntary Marine Conservation Areas Ports and harbours Fisheries organisations RN, MCA Local authorities EU INTERREG IIIb & c programme
Develop the region's coastal and marine knowledge base	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Development of a South West Coastal and Marine Observatory to monitor the region's coastal environment and carry out research. 2 Audit the coastal and marine knowledge and technology base in the region as a basis for future development. 3 Support for monitoring and planning for climate change on the coast. 4 Promote and support a campaign of marine and coastal awareness. 	National Funding councils EU 6 th Framework C'Clif CCMS & MBA Plymouth, Universities Cornwall and Devon Coastal Research Fora DTI Marine Foresight Industry SeaQuest, VMCA and other voluntary groups
Enhance the sustainable economic potential of the coast.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Develop the potential of the region as a centre of "clean" marine technologies of energy generation, transport, recreation and pollution control. 2 A "Sustainable Ports Project" to maintain competitiveness and protect marine habitat quality 3 Agree a sustainable level of harvesting and maintaining fish populations 	Fisheries organisations DTI Structural Funds Universities Industry SWRDA EU Ports and harbours VMCA's, Wildlife Trusts
Reduce diffuse marine pollution from land-based sources.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Target river key catchments to develop partnerships with agriculture to reduce nutrient, chemical and soil run off. 	EA through LEAPs MAFF Farming and Wildlife Groups. Farmers



Sustainability South West

4th Floor, 100 Temple Street, Bristol, BS1 6AE
 Tel. 0117 933 0249 Fax. 0117 933 0240
sustainabilitysouthwest@yahoo.co.uk



South West
 Regional Assembly

South West Regional Assembly

Dennet House, 11 Middle Street, Taunton, TA1 1SH
 Tel. 01823 425219 Fax. 01823 425200
Sue.Watts@swemployers.gov.uk