

CHAPTER 14

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In addition to the specific impacts that have been identified and the challenges and opportunities which they represent the following more general observations have been drawn from the study.

Awareness

Adaptation to climate change is not generally perceived to be important across the South West Region. The significance of potential changes in the climate is most apparent to those with responsibilities for and interests in the natural environment.

Natural scientists and academics dealing with ecology, geology, hydrology, flora and fauna etc especially those with responsibility for nature conservation and biodiversity are particularly concerned. Similar awareness and concern is expressed by those with responsibility for managing rivers, coasts and water resources. Generally this concern does not extend to the more commercial applications in the natural environment, particularly agriculture, where other pressures seem to predominate.

The public sector is aware of the issues surrounding climate change, but is not generally advanced in its thinking. Local government is generally subject to initiative overload, and diminishing units of resource. Climate change issues do feature, for example through the Nottingham Declaration, but the focus is mainly upon mitigation and sustainability issues, rather than adaptation.

The private sector is generally notable for its lack of concern, both with regard to potential threats and to potential opportunities. Some notable exceptions include the water industry and parts of the environmental technology sector.

Literature

The literature on climate change adaptation is generally addressed to national and international issues, rather than regional. There is very little literature on socio-economic issues, potential changes in lifestyle and impacts on the world of commerce and industry. The available literature is mainly focussed on physical impacts, and generally identifies problems rather than opportunities resulting from climate change.

Opportunities

The project Steering Group has been keen to identify opportunities as well as problems arising from climate change. This has revealed two

different dilemmas in seeking to identify more positive implications.

The first dilemma concerns the idea of making commercial benefit from what might be seen as other people's misery. Some consultees have felt uneasy about exploiting business opportunities arising from, increased flooding or structural damage. Such unease is unfounded. These services will be much appreciated in the event of predicted impacts.

The second dilemma concerns the reluctance of policy makers to admit to any possible benefits arising from climate change. This assumes that people will be less inclined to commit themselves to reducing further climate change if there appear to be lots of benefits forthcoming. The study has assumed that the public is sufficiently sophisticated to appreciate both challenge and opportunity, and has presented its findings accordingly.

Regional Dimension

The South West Region is both extensive and diverse. This is reflected physically (coast, sea, moor and urban settlements), climatically (spatial variations in temperature, rainfall, and exposure to winds and storms), and economically (M4 corridor and Cornwall).

It will be appropriate for some adaptation strategies to be orchestrated at a regional scale. Other initiatives will be more appropriate at a sub-regional scale. Some local agencies, working in partnership (eg. Dorset Coastal Forum), are well advanced with their thinking and are well positioned to implement appropriate adaptation strategies in their localities.

Sustainability

Although the focus of this study has been on adaptation to climate change, it is essential also to consider the human activity which increases the rate of that change. There is a potential conflict between pursuing mitigation issues at the expense of adaptation concerns, or *vice-versa*. The study has revealed a greater awareness of mitigation, and a limited appreciation of the need to adapt. The sustainability agenda can only be achieved through engagement with both mitigation and adaptation. We can neither continue to accelerate climate change nor ignore its potential impacts.

The Way Forward

The Scoping Study provides only the start to an ongoing process of regional activity. The involvement of key stakeholders in the study, from private, public and voluntary sectors, has been crucial to its findings and recommendations. The continuing engagement of these and other stakeholders will ensure that both the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change are the subject of appropriate concern across the region.