

Responding to Rising Seas

OECD Country Approaches to Tackling Coastal Risks

POLICY HIGHLIGHTS



3 Towards an effective approach to tackling coastal risks

Drawing on lessons from detailed case studies in Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Germany, this report puts forward four principles that should be taken into consideration by national governments as they further develop and implement their adaptation responses.

Engage stakeholders early and substantively

Policy makers should engage stakeholders in the early stages of decision-making and throughout the entire decision-making process to enhance overall resilience in coastal areas, while supporting community ownership and buy-in.

While engagement is an important component of any policy change, there are specific qualities of coastal adaptation that require extra consideration:

- Sea-level rise risks are complex and difficult to understand. This is in part due to cognitive barriers around understanding risk, compounded by the fact that sea-level risks are relatively new, have associated uncertainty, and very long time scales.
- Coastal adaptation decisions, as well as sea-level rise itself, can pose a significant threat to private assets, including people's homes. It is understandable that communities may feel threatened by some adaptation measures - homes are often the most significant material and financial possession people have.

Engaging all affected stakeholders in the policy-making process is needed to ensure the development of a shared vision of risks. Once this has been achieved, it is possible to discuss and manage trade-offs across stakeholders, who can be differently affected by the economic and social impacts of sea-level rise, as well as the options to address it. Difficult decisions (e.g. limiting the approval of new properties, relocation of existing properties) should be considered, discussed and planned through a coherent, long-term approach. National governments should prioritise engagement, and provide the necessary support to other levels of government.

Stakeholder engagement in Truro, Nova Scotia

Truro, a small agricultural town in Nova Scotia, Canada, already experiences frequent severe flooding which will be exacerbated as sea-level rise continues. Raising sea walls was only modelled as effective at its most costly: when constructed as high as locally necessary (6 metres high in some areas, with commensurate design challenges given the footing width of such a dike), and when accompanied by specialised pumping (30% of priority areas protected for CAD 300 million). An alternative solution was to realign part of an existing dike and allowing privately-owned agricultural land to flood. As part of this process, a group of directly affected landowners was engaged in difficult conversations with a range of government representatives and researchers. The project proponents listened meaningfully and made adaptations to their plan, including dike placement and adding monitoring for mosquitoes. The result of this ongoing engagement was the first time affected residents in Nova Scotia voted for managed retreat: in effect, sacrificing private land for ecosystem purposes.