



Participation in coastal zone management initiatives: a review and analysis of examples from the UK

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ABSTRACT

General approaches that have been developed for facilitating community participation in coastal/estuarine management initiatives in the UK are considered and their implementation reviewed. It is argued that rural communities are more willing to participate proactively in such initiatives and that their relatively close association with the natural resources in question dictates that such participation is of particular importance. Urban communities, on the other hand, are less closely associated with natural resources and are less likely to take an interest in such initiatives, whilst recreational communities, especially those that are relatively diffuse, are more likely to take a reactive role in objecting to proposed management restrictions. It is concluded that, like many aspects of local coastal management, the approaches taken to community participation should be tailored to local characteristics, and that it is difficult to define an approach that represents 'best practice', though general approaches to improving the management formulation process by providing for community input are being developed and more widely applied in the UK. Issues related to the balance between providing for meaningful community participation and achieving strategic management objectives are considered, as are the possible reasons why community participation has a relatively low profile in the UK. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of community and public involvement in environmental decision making has long been recognised in the resource management

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literature generally and more recently in specific relation to coastal zone management. Although there is still debate over such questions as the degree of public involvement that is feasible and the characteristics of an effective public involvement programme, Mitchell¹ suggests that public involvement has the potential to make the resource allocation process more effective and equitable. This paper uses examples from estuary management in England and Scotland to illustrate the challenges posed and opportunities offered by community involvement in coastal management.

The need to involve local and user communities in the development of coastal zone management initiatives is becoming increasingly recognised in the UK. To some extent, the impetus for this has been prompted by the attempted imposition of management schemes which have subsequently been subject to widespread criticism by local communities on the grounds that there was a lack of consultation during plan preparation, examples of which are discussed later. These plans were amongst the first initiatives that tried to address a problem identified by the House of Commons Environment Committee in 1992² that 'coastal protection, planning and management in the United Kingdom suffers from centuries of uncoordinated decisions and actions at both the national and local levels'. The Committee also stated that they found that there were 'inadequacies in legislation, anomalies in the planning system, a lack of central guidance, and overlapping and conflicting policies and responsibilities (and in some cases a lack of action) among a host of bodies, with poor coordination between them'. In its response³, the UK government accepted the need for all coastal management initiatives, particularly at a local level, to be integrated in terms of the interaction between the different organisations and agencies that have statutory responsibilities at the coast, but ruled out any fundamental changes in the statutory planning framework.

However, since 1992 there have been a number of government initiatives set in place to attempt to rectify some of the identified problems, particularly that of a lack of central guidance. The government produced a Planning Policy Guidance Note entitled *Coastal Planning*⁴ in 1992, which provides guidance to local authorities and others on policies and the operation of the planning system at the coast (although this was not due to the aforementioned report). Subsequently reviews have been carried out on coastal management plans and the powers supporting them⁵ and the possibility of extending planning controls below low water mark.⁶ More recently the government has produced a document summarising policy guidelines⁷ for the coast and has commissioned the production of a best practice guide for the preparation and implementation of local coastal management plans (due to be published in the summer of 1996).

As a result of these reviews of current coastal management practice it is evident that 'the government favours an approach to coastal management which builds on existing institutional structures, so that organisations such as local authorities, harbour authorities, the Environment Agency and Sea Fisheries Committees each retain their statutory responsibilities, but work together at the most appropriate local level. Rather than imposing solutions it seeks to encourage local resolution of conflicts and development of opportunities, within a clear framework of national policies.'⁵ In the same report the government states that '... the voluntary, multi-agency approach promoted in this paper is the most effective way to meet these objectives ...'.⁵ The UK government has, therefore, stated that it considers that a voluntary, devolutionary approach to integrated coastal management is the most appropriate, with local authorities, whose powers largely cease at the low water mark, acting as lead agencies, working in conjunction with the statutory agencies with their various sectoral powers, other organisations, and the local communities. This has serious implications for community participation in coastal management initiatives, as a voluntary approach requires agreement and consensus building, which can only be achieved when all potentially affected parties have been involved in the plan preparation or management process.

Another impetus for greater levels of public involvement in coastal zone management has been the publicity afforded to Agenda 21. Following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, local authorities were encouraged to adopt their own sustainable development strategy, or Local Agenda 21, including partnerships with businesses, community, and voluntary groups. In the UK, the Local Government Management Board has been charged with producing guidance for local authorities on achieving sustainable development as part of a Local Agenda 21 initiative. This has involved a number of cross-sectoral roundtable discussions, which have been used as a method for drawing up guidelines for achieving sustainability in a number of key topic areas. One such discussion was concerned with the coast and led to the production of a document *Action on the Coast*⁸, which outlines ways of ensuring sustainable use of this resource. This document acknowledges that a key part of Local Agenda 21 is enabling individuals and communities to take action to improve the environment, and suggests that the coastal manager 'involve the whole community, in whatever initiative you take: watchwords are 'early', 'ownership', 'involvement' and 'participation' (rather than 'consultation')'.

At an international level, the importance of public participation in coastal zone management has long been recognised as of benefit in coastal initiatives elsewhere, particularly in the USA. Grennell,⁹ for example, asserts that the key to the success of California's coastal decision-making

process has been the citizen-driven coastal movement of the 1970s. It was the failure to fully appreciate this in some British coastal management initiatives that led to some early problems, and in an attempt to avoid the repetition of such problems more recent initiatives include an overt attempt to incorporate the views of the local community. This paper aims to consider a number of these initiatives and to assess the extent to which they are addressing the need for community participation. Some wider issues concerning the potential for community participation in the context of UK initiatives will also be discussed.

2. REVIEW OF INITIATIVES

2.1. The failure of traditional approaches

Community participation in coastal zone management in the UK has traditionally been elicited through consultation exercises based upon the established town and country planning system, whereby strategies, policies, and development plans are prepared following initial discussions with key interested parties and only then are they more widely publicised and circulated for comment.¹⁰ These comments are then analysed and revisions may be made accordingly until a reasonably acceptable level of agreement is reached and most major objections are overcome, though the powers enjoyed by local authorities above the low water mark mean that many objectors have no right of appeal should their objections be overruled. With local authorities taking a lead role in most coastal initiatives, partly because of their role as planning authorities, this approach was generally adopted in the initial round of estuary management plans, drawn up after 1992, including those for the Exe Estuary and the Taw/Torridge Estuary (both in Devon), and Poole Harbour, Dorset. This approach attracted vigorous criticism from user groups and local residents who felt that they should have been included at an earlier stage in the formulation process, so that their views could be used to inform the production of the draft plans. In all of these cases management plans formulated with little if any community participation had to be withdrawn and reformulated by processes that placed a much greater emphasis on community participation, with a view to implementation by voluntary cooperation rather than statutory control.

Even though the plans were never intended to marginalise local communities, the lack of community involvement in the early stages of plan preparation and the one-off nature of the consultation exercises created suspicions amongst user groups and local communities concerning

the motives of such plans. The implementation of these plans has therefore had to be delayed while wider consultation exercises are conducted, but such exercises have had to overcome the previously created suspicions as to the plans' objectives, which, in turn, poses the potential for significant problems in their eventual implementation. The type of consultation used in these examples mirrors that used in the town and country planning system, whereby a draft report on land use zoning is normally produced for consultation purposes. In the case of the Taw/Torridge initiative, a proposal to zone the use of water skiing was not even communicated to the sport's national governing body, the British Water Ski Federation, who were understandably unhappy with this, particularly as the estuary is one of the premier coastal locations for this sport.¹¹ Such examples give rise to the argument that the community should be extended to include national sports governing bodies in an estuarine management initiative due to the fact that they represent the interests of a large number of users whose interests would otherwise not be represented. This is one aspect of the consultation process which is now being given greater emphasis and would now be considered good practice in UK estuary management planning.

It might thus be concluded that failing to provide for community participation in the early stages of the management plan preparation process critically undermines the potential for success of such initiatives. The examples discussed above indicate that adopting the traditional UK town and country planning approach, whereby the participation of users and local communities is delayed until the stage where they are consulted about the contents of a draft management plan, leads to suspicion and hostility amongst communities and thus promotes conflict rather than laying the foundations for voluntary cooperation. The subsequent reviews shall therefore concentrate on analysing the measures taken to enable community participation in the formulation of estuarine management plans prior to consultation on the draft plan, as well as considering the effectiveness of such measures in providing for meaningful community participation in the local CZM process.

2.2. The role of the national nature conservation agencies

It is becoming increasingly recognised that the estuarine resource of the UK is under threat due to the increased levels of conflict between different uses and priorities.¹² As part of a long-term approach to protecting coastal habitats, English Nature has introduced a 'Campaign for a Living Coast', which is intended to focus attention on finding sustainable ways of managing the coast. In recognition of the pressures placed on estuaries, arguably the most important coastal environment in the UK in terms of

strategic conservation value, English Nature has implemented a 'Strategy for the Sustainable use of England's Estuaries'.¹³

English Nature is the government's adviser on nature conservation in England and is also responsible for the identification and notification of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), where important natural habitats are afforded some form of statutory protection from potentially damaging activities. Since 1993, estuary management plans in England have been produced as part of English Nature's Estuaries Initiative, part of their Campaign for a Living Coast. The main purpose of this initiative is 'to achieve the sustainable use of England's estuaries by all estuary users and regulatory authorities, through the preparation and implementation of integrated management plans that have been developed, and are supported, by these users and authorities themselves'.¹³ Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), who are the government's advisers on nature conservation in Scotland, have similarly encouraged the preparation of management plans for estuaries in Scotland through the subsequent launch of their Firths Initiative in 1994.

Since the launch of these initiatives, at least 27 estuarine management projects have been supported by English Nature,¹⁴ whilst six such projects have been supported by SNH,¹⁵ this support generally being through financial support for existing projects or through the appointment of estuary project officers to undertake preliminary work on new projects. Both English Nature and SNH have explicitly recognised the need to work in voluntary partnership with other statutory agencies and relevant organisations, as their statutory conservation powers for the protective management of SSSIs and other statutory nature conservation sites can operate only under the land planning system, which ceases at the low water mark, and they therefore require the support and willingness of other agencies and organisations in order to ensure the sustainable management of estuaries. These initiatives thus represent the implementation of the UK government's favoured approach to local coastal zone management, as previously discussed.

Crucially, both agencies have also recognised the need for community participation, English Nature stating that 'a necessary first step is for local people who use and manage the estuary to discuss the need for management, their individual needs and aspirations and ways of taking estuary management forward. It is essential that all those who use and manage the estuary are involved in the discussions, to ensure that any action has the widespread support and commitment of those whom it will affect and reflects the consensus view of local needs'.¹³

It is important to note that very few of the reviewed estuarine management initiatives are yet at the stage of implementation, and the

following reviews and discussions are therefore focused on community involvement in the preparation of estuarine management plans.

2.3. General approaches adopted to provide for community participation

In a recent review of estuary projects, English Nature has concluded that most estuary projects have now established the foundations for a successful project, including wide participation, effective consultation, and a consensus-based approach. However, they also recognise that there are several areas where there is room for improvement, including the need to ensure a balanced representation of all interests on the management committee, encouraging industry to become involved with the projects at an early stage, and improving consultation so that everyone has an opportunity to influence the project.¹⁴ In the light of these conclusions, it is worth discussing the four general approaches that have been adopted in order to provide for community participation.

2.3.1. Steering committee

Most estuary management initiatives are overseen by a steering committee which normally comprises a representative from all agencies with relevant statutory responsibilities, such as the Environment Agency, which is the national government agency with responsibility for the regulation of air/water pollution and waste disposal, English Nature/Scottish Natural Heritage, local planning authorities, port/harbour authorities, the Sports Council, and the Crown Estates Commission, who own much of the foreshore and most of the seabed around the UK coastline. These statutory bodies may be supplemented by representatives from organisations such as water companies, environmental groups, sports governing bodies, and estuary user groups, although the exact make-up of any steering committee will be determined to a large extent by the nature of the estuary and the mix of activities that take place there.

The steering committee normally makes decisions in respect of management proposals and has a final say on what is or is not included within the management plan, though they are not an executive body in that most aspects of the plan must be taken forward and implemented by appropriate statutory agencies. The make-up of these committees has often been criticised, with those not represented perceiving it to be difficult to get their point of view across or to be able to make positive contributions to plan development.

2.3.2. Topic groups

One of the main ways around the potential for problems based on the limited representation of steering committees has been the use of topic

groups which are made up of those organisations representing a particular activity on the estuary, such as recreation, fisheries, or commercial use. The number and subject areas of these groups will be determined by the uses which occur on the estuary and they will often include a representative from the steering committee. They are used as a forum for identifying issues to be addressed, problem solving, and the development of new ideas taking into account the views of all interested parties. In turn this will often lead to the production of a topic report, which provides background information on the activities and may include proposals for future management. The steering committee should then take the topic group findings into account when they are preparing the draft management plan. Topic groups thus provide a route for participation in the management plan formulation process by the various interests not represented on the steering committee.

2.3.3. Return forms/questionnaires

A commonly used method for including members of the wider local community in plan design is to produce and widely circulate an explanatory leaflet in the early stages of the plan formulation process, explaining the purpose of the plan and the key actors involved. A sheet is often attached to this on which interested individuals can express their general interest in the initiative, declare their particular interest, and highlight areas of particular concern. This is then returned to the project officer or steering committee, in order that they can compile a record of all interested parties and the nature of their interest. At the very least, this list can then be used to keep all interested parties and the wider community informed of progress through the circulation of a newsletter and ensure that they know when the consultation draft of the management plan is going to be available for comment. This method also potentially enables the specific concerns of different groups to be identified and incorporated into the management plan preparation process through the circulation of questionnaires in order to gain more detailed information on priorities over specific issues and suggestions concerning potential management approaches.

2.3.4. Seminars/workshops

A method that is often used to gain a better insight into the concerns and aspirations of different groups amongst the wider community is the organisation of consultation seminars/workshops, which can provide a platform for more qualitative and interactive discussions concerning issues. These may be held at any stage of the process to discuss anything from the very need for a management plan initiative, through to the detailed findings and recommendations of a specific topic group.

Having considered the general approaches that have been adopted in order to provide for community participation in the formulation of estuarine management plans, it is worth looking at the details of the approaches adopted by three estuarine management initiatives in England (North Kent Marshes, Medina Estuary, and Portsmouth Harbour) and three in Scotland (Solway Firth, Firth of Forth, and Moray Firth).

2.4. North Kent Marshes

The North Kent Marshes constitute a large area south of London and the Thames Estuary, rarely exceeding a height of 10 m above sea level and covering an area of some 103 km². They include the whole of the Isle of Sheppey and the urban areas of Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham, Sittingbourne, and Faversham. It is an important recreational resource for local urban and rural populations and also for London. The estuary supports a major port at Sheerness and includes numerous important national and international nature conservation designations. English Nature provided support for the preparation of a management plan through the appointment of a project officer to oversee its production. Due to the large size of the estuary, the steering committee is correspondingly large and includes representatives from five local planning authorities, the Sports Council, English Nature, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Port of Sheerness Ltd, the Environment Agency, South East England Tourist Board, the Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee, the County Landowners' Association, and the National Farmers Union.

Early in the process, it was recognised that one of the best ways forward would be to issue requests for statements of interest and to follow these with the creation of a number of specific topic groups to consider the numerous activities that take place on the estuary.

One of the key topic groups was that for recreation and the Sports Council (South East Region) took responsibility for this as representatives from the steering committee. Initially the project officer and the Sports Council identified a number of key groups that should be involved, including many of the sports clubs and associations that use the marshes for recreation. These were invited to take part in a meeting to discuss key issues and concerns, held in a local sailing club on the shores of the estuary. This location was chosen to impart a feeling of neutrality and to focus attention on the issue at hand. The meeting was attended by representatives from national governing bodies (including both local and national officers) of organisations such as the Royal Yachting Association,

the Personal Watercraft Association, the British Water Ski Federation, and the Ramblers Association. Other sports represented included orienteering, cycling, canoeing, and wildfowling. Many of those present were members of the Medway Yachting Association, an organisation that seeks to represent the interests of water sports on the estuary and includes members from most local clubs. The meeting provided an opportunity for each representative to outline the key concerns of their group and then for these to be discussed by the whole group. It therefore provided an ideal opportunity for the identification of recreational issues and substantial progress was made in addressing various concerns in the space of one meeting.¹⁶

In addition to this meeting, a publicity leaflet was produced outlining the need for a recreation topic paper and inviting members of the public to register an interest. This was widely circulated amongst clubs and associations and put on display in public buildings such as libraries. The leaflet also advertised and extended a wide invitation to a public meeting to be held to discuss recreation matters, and was distributed to all those people who had registered an interest in the whole of the estuary management initiative. The responses to the leaflet were relatively low in number, but those received were useful in helping to build up a picture of issues to be addressed, ranging from access to the water to the disturbance of wildfowl by ramblers. An attendance of around 30 at the meeting was disappointing, and included representatives of some groups that had been represented at the earlier meeting. However, those that did attend made a very useful contribution to the whole process and were added to the list of those to be kept informed.

On reflection, some of the possible reasons for the relatively poor response include the lack of time made available for consultation (less than two months) and the fact that many of the recreational users of the estuary are not local in that they travel from London, among other places, to enjoy the marshes. Many of these users will not be members of local sporting clubs, but may themselves have a significant impact on levels of use and conflicts that arise. To attempt to include such non-local 'unorganised' members of the user community in the consultation process would be almost impossible and this is where the involvement of sports national governing bodies is of particular importance, though many users may not be members of such national bodies either, particularly casual sports such as jet skiing and water skiing. It is thus important that local initiatives recognise the impact that non-locals can have and ensure that any management measures are effectively communicated to them as soon as possible, through the use of improved signing and provision of information at main access points.

2.5. The Medina Estuary, Isle of Wight

This estuary is relatively small in that it has an area of approximately 2 km², and is used for recreation, tourism, agriculture, and commercial purposes. In addition, it has national and international nature conservation status and is of historical and cultural importance. There are three main settlements within the estuary, namely Newport, East Cowes, and West Cowes, although the majority of the estuary runs through a rural landscape. The combined population of these settlements is approximately 40 000. The management plan under preparation is being supported by English Nature and has a steering committee comprising representatives from English Nature, Isle of Wight Council, the Environment Agency, Southern Water, and Cowes Harbour Commissioners.

As a relatively recent initiative, it has been able to benefit from good practice elsewhere and is essentially using the approach outlined previously of appointing a project officer to oversee the plan's development and the creation of topic groups to produce reports that will inform the management plan formulation process. A publicity leaflet was produced explaining the process and asking for statements of interest and a public meeting was organised to launch the initiative. The leaflet and supporting posters were widely distributed throughout the catchment area, mainly by leaving copies in shops, restaurants, and public buildings, as well as by circulation directly to existing clubs, associations, local politicians, and commercial operations that were known to use the estuary. The public meeting was well attended, with approximately 100 people in attendance from all walks of life, including fishermen, farmers, sailors, and families. A number of fishermen attended specifically to object to the plan on the grounds that they had not been consulted during its production. As the plan had not yet been written it was relatively easy to convince them that the whole initiative was worthwhile and that, as this was the start of the process, they would be given ample opportunity to become involved. Once the procedure had been outlined and the need for the plan explained, those present were asked if they would like to become involved in topic groups. A number were quickly identified and individuals were asked to join the group that was of most interest to them. From this it was possible to identify those people who were prepared to help in the production of topic reports and those that would just like to be kept informed.¹⁷

In addition to the above, the local newspaper agreed to run a regular article on progress with the plan and a regular newsletter was produced and circulated to all those who had registered an interest, some 500 people to date. The topic groups have proved to be very effective, and many have been, at least in part, written by members of the community based on their

knowledge of the estuary and the main issues to be tackled. In fact, the fishermen who had initially been sceptical about the whole initiative have written their own comprehensive report and in addition volunteered to give up some of their spare time to assist in collecting data on recreational use of the estuary.

Whilst there is no specific user forum for the estuary, the estuary management plan initiative has helped to foster a sense of community spirit and ownership of the plan, which has not always been the case with other initiatives. However, the limitations of community involvement were highlighted by the response to a request for comments on a draft scoping document for the estuary. The document was made available in public libraries and the main council office, and the request for comments was sent to all 500 people who had registered an interest. To date not one response has been received. This either implies that there was nothing contentious in the draft document, which would have been highly unlikely, or that most people are just happy to be informed rather than take a proactive role.

2.6. Portsmouth Harbour, Hampshire

This harbour covers an area of 16 km² and has a shoreline of approximately 55 km. Both this and the Medina Estuary open on to the Solent, one of the busiest coastal waterways in England. Portsmouth Harbour is surrounded by the urban areas of Portsmouth, Gosport, and Fareham with a combined population in excess of 250 000. It is also the headquarters of the Naval Home Command, has the second busiest commercial ferry port in the country, and is an important recreational resource, accommodating over 4000 boats. It is of major historic and cultural importance, as well as being of high conservation value, the majority of the harbour having been designated as an SSSI, under UK legislation, as a Ramsar Site, under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, and as a Special Protection Area (SPA), under the European Community Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

The harbour plan currently being prepared is designed to be an updated version of the existing plan and more effort has gone into facilitating community involvement. The steering committee for this initiative comprises of four local planning authorities, the Queen's Harbour Master, Crown Estate, and English Nature. All of these have statutory duties within the harbour and would therefore be considered to be the main decision makers. It is interesting to note, however, that there is no representation of recreational, NGO environmental, or commercial interests on the committee, with the exception of the commercial ferry port, which is represented by its owners, Portsmouth City Council.

The approach adopted for this project differs from the other examples in that it has not used topic groups, but has instead relied on wider community participation, through the publicity and collation of statements of interest. In addition, a public meeting was held at the start of the project, publicised by media releases, to discuss significant areas of concern. The initial consultation period was set for six weeks, in line with the minimum time period required for consultation during the town and country planning process, although this was subsequently extended to allow greater time for the receipt of responses.

Considering the size of the local population, the responses to both the leaflet and meeting were disappointing, with less than 70 responses to the leaflet and no more than 30 people attending the meeting. Most of those who did respond represented the 'organised' community: businesses, clubs, associations, and other groups that the local authorities had identified as needing to be consulted. Very few members of the general community came forward. This is at least partially explained by the fact that very few people living adjacent to the harbour actually derive an income from it or the activities it supports, and as access to the shoreline is limited by Ministry of Defence land holdings, shore-based recreational opportunities are somewhat constrained.

However, all the contributions that have been made in terms of information provided and issues raised have proven to be very useful and have been addressed within the draft management plan. The lack of community involvement in this initiative has not necessarily been damaging to the process, as those who have become involved have a real interest in the future of the harbour, and dealing with small numbers of people makes administration of the whole process much more manageable.

The plan is still at a very early stage and it is not possible to draw firm conclusions regarding the effectiveness of community involvement. It is worth noting, however, that in the initial meeting to explain to interested parties what was happening, over half of the attendees complained on a response sheet that there had been no draft plan to comment on. This is particularly interesting in the light of criticisms aimed at early initiatives where consultation did not start until a draft plan had been produced with little public involvement, and in light of English Nature's advice to ensure that consultation should start sooner rather than later.¹⁴

2.7. The Solway Firth

Like the other Scottish initiatives discussed, the Solway Firth management initiative extends well beyond the estuary and includes essentially open

coastline that lies within the Firth. Thus the management area is not as discrete as for many of the English initiatives, which are relatively small and cover readily identifiable estuarine areas. By contrast, the Solway Firth management initiative covers over 350 km of coastline, the outer extremes of which are around 80 km apart across the Irish Sea. The coastline is also relatively rural and has a population of only 162 000. The estuary itself is the third largest in the UK and regularly supports over 120 000 wintering waterfowl, including nine species of international importance. The inner estuary is designated as a Ramsar site and as a Special Protection Area, and a part of it known as Caerlaverock is the UK's only entirely intertidal Biosphere Reserve and is also a National Nature Reserve.

The Solway Firth Partnership (SFP) was launched in 1994 to promote the integrated management of the Solway Firth, a task that is complicated by the fact that the administrative boundary between England and Scotland divides the firth. The steering group of the SFP is composed solely of representatives of statutory agencies and bodies, unlike in the other Scottish initiatives, and this has been a source of criticism in terms of the lack representation of conservation organisations and other special interest groups. After a media launch and an initial call for expressions of interest from the wider community, a series of theme-based consultation seminars were held at three different coastal towns in order to gain a general impression of the local communities' priorities and concerns over various issues, and were attended by over 100 people. Ten topic groups with a wide representation including special interest and user groups were subsequently launched and their findings condensed into a draft issues paper, which was published in 1996 and circulated to over 900 people as well as being made available in all local government offices and libraries.

This paper outlined management issues but did not include any recommendations, including instead a questionnaire inviting comments and suggestions for management measures that should be adopted; at the time of writing, this invitation had only just been circulated so it is not possible to gauge the response to it. In addition, three community workshops were held at different locations to provide an open forum for the discussion of management issues and provide a further opportunity for the input of general members of the community to the development of the management strategy, and these were attended by over 100 people. A measure of the wide interest in the SFP initiative is the fact that since the initial call for expressions of interest the distribution list for their newsletter has now grown to over 900 people, many of whom are members of the wider 'unorganised' community.

It is interesting to note that a commonly raised issue at the community

workshop held at a town near the inner estuary was the lack of community participation over the proposal to designate the Upper Solway Flats and Marshes as a Special Area for Conservation (SAC) under the European Commission's Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). It was felt that the local communities had not been consulted until the proposal was an effective *fait accompli*, and that the designation represented unnecessary top-down bureaucracy. This highlights the potential for conflicts between such strategic statutory conservation initiatives and local communities.

2.8. The Firth of Forth

Though this strategic management initiative is known as the Forth Estuary Forum, it encompasses the wider firth and covers around 150 km of coastline, the outer points of which are 30 km apart. The Firth of Forth is relatively urbanised and has a surrounding population of over 1 million. Like Portsmouth Harbour, it has a large naval base (Rosyth), and also has a large petrochemical refinery (Grangemouth). There are also two large loading terminals for the export of crude oil and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) by tankers, as well as an expanding freight cargo port. Like many relatively industrialised estuaries, the Firth of Forth also has several areas of strategic ornithological conservation value, and includes a network of 24 intertidal SSSIs covering a total area of 69 km², 14 of which are proposed Ramsar/SPA sites. There are also three existing SPAs and a National Nature Reserve which cover islands with cliffs which are important breeding areas for sea birds.

The Forth Estuary Forum was launched in 1993 and three theme-based consultation seminars were held at its second Annual General Meeting in 1995, which were attended by around 100 people. However, most of those present at the seminars were representatives of statutory bodies and conservation and special interest groups; there were relatively few representatives of the wider 'unorganised' community. Ten topic groups were subsequently formed, each of which is due to produce an issues report which will include management recommendations. These topic groups include representatives of user and special interest groups, but so far there has been relatively little opportunity for input by the wider community to the development of the management strategy, as efforts have been focused on promoting integration between statutory agencies and bodies rather than fostering community participation. An indication of this is the fact that the FEF's newsletter is distributed to around only 200 people, most of whom are representatives of the 'organised' community.

However, shortly after its launch the FEF in conjunction with two local universities did explore the issue of promoting community participation

through (a) rapid rural appraisal;¹⁸ (b) the use of environmental valuation as a means of assessing the indirect values held by local communities for different natural areas;¹⁹ and (c) the development of a community involvement policy,²⁰ though the findings of these exploratory initiatives remain largely unapplied.

2.9. The Moray Firth

The Moray Firth is on the eastern coast of the Scottish Highlands and is relatively undeveloped and rural. The area encompassed by the management initiative includes around 450 km of coastline, the outer points of which are 120 km apart across the North Sea, but has a population of only around 150 000 people. The Beatrice oil field lies within the firth 22 km off the mainland, a pipeline from which transports crude oil to a coastal tanker-loading terminal. There are also numerous oil industry related developments on the Firth, including six platform and pipeline fabrication yards.

The Moray Firth Partnership was only launched in 1996 following nearly four years of widespread community consultation concerning the very need for such an initiative. During this period two 'Future Firth' conferences were held, the second of which was attended by nearly 200 people many of whom were from the wider community. In addition one workshop was held for statutory and voluntary bodies and another for members of the wider community in order to discuss coastal management related issues, an attitude survey was conducted amongst the local communities, and numerous community awareness raising initiatives were undertaken. As such this initiative has taken a very cautious approach and has spent several years promoting support for such an initiative amongst local communities. This approach has been taken in order to establish groundswell support and to promote the active and constructive participation of local communities in the management initiative as it develops, without which the initiative could be jeopardised due to the relative importance of the views of the community on this largely undeveloped coastline.

3. DISCUSSION

It could be argued that one of the main patterns that emerges from the six reviewed initiatives (summarised in Table 1) is that the more rural and less urbanised the area in question is, the greater the emphasis that is paid to community participation in the strategic management initiative. Thus

TABLE 1
Summary of case studies

<i>Name</i>	<i>Shoreline (km)</i>	<i>Development profile</i>	<i>Main uses</i>	<i>Community participation</i>	<i>Comments</i>
North Kent Marshes	223	Mixed	Commercial Port & Recreation	Steering Committee, Statements of Interest, Public Meetings, Topic Groups, Newsletter	Considering size of local population, disappointing levels of participation in recreation public meetings (30). Good participation in topic reports
Medina Estuary	20	Rural	Recreation	Steering Committee, Statements of Interest, Public Meetings, Topic Groups, Newsletter	Well attended public meeting. Over 500 people have registered an interest. Active involvement in topic reports
Portsmouth Harbour	55	Urban	Naval Base, Commercial Port & Recreation	Steering Committee, Statements of Interest, Public Meetings	Good response from clubs and associa- tions but little response from wider community
Solway Firth	350	Rural	Shell/Salmon Fishing & Recreation; High Conservation Value	Steering Committee, Statements of Interest, Public Meetings, Topic Groups, Newsletter	Well attended public meetings. Over 900 people have registered an interest, mainly from the wider community
Firth of Forth	150	Urban	Naval Base, Oil Related and Other Commercial Activities	Steering Committee, Consultation Seminars, Topic Groups, Newsletter	Very little involvement from the wider community, mainly involves statutory bodies and special interest groups
Moray Firth	450	Rural	Oil Related Activities	Public Meetings	Wide consultation involving well sup- ported meetings: management forum at early stage of development as cautious approach adopted

several years were spent consulting the community on the very need for such an initiative for the Moray Firth on the coast of the Scottish Highlands, whilst the initiative on the Solway Firth has paid considerable attention to conducting outreach exercises in order to provide for community participation in the development of the management strategy, and in both cases considerable interest in these initiatives has been shown by the wider community.

On the other hand, the Firth of Forth and Portsmouth Harbour initiatives have focused their efforts on promoting integration amongst the regulatory bodies, with community participation being largely restricted to representation by special interest and user groups and relatively little interest being shown in these initiatives by the wider community. With regard to the Medina Estuary and North Kent Marshes initiatives, both of which are relatively rural and are of particular value as recreation and tourism resources, the wider community has again shown relatively little interest in these initiatives as is evidenced by the poor responses to the attempts to gain actual feedback on management proposals, one of the explanations for which could be the difficulty of involving the many recreational users who only visit the area. Whilst it could simply be argued that, with the exception of the Firth of Forth, these initiatives are at a relatively advanced stage and that the rural initiatives discussed above will gain similarly poor community feedback when they ask for comments on defined management proposals, the initial indications are that the wider community is more willing to participate proactively in initiatives concerning rural coastal areas and that this willingness is recognised and incorporated into the initiative.

In relation to the above observation it could be argued that many people on rural coastal and estuarine areas live relatively close to the marine resources in question, in that many of them either directly derive a living from it through activities such as fishing or they indirectly derive benefit from it through activities such as angling and wildfowling, or through more passive activities such as bird watching and landscape appreciation. Such stakeholding communities can thus be fairly easily defined and their participation is likely to be relatively forthcoming provided the appropriate approaches are taken to publicising the initiative and facilitating their input. They are also relatively accustomed to being involved in the local rural community and perhaps participating in informal management arrangements.

On the other hand the communities around urban coastal and estuarine areas tend simply to live by the sea: very few people directly derive a living from it and relatively few derive indirect benefit from it. Thus the main interest in management initiatives for such areas is shown by the

major commercial and military stakeholders, user groups, and the relevant regulatory and planning authorities. On the whole the local communities are likely to take little interest in such initiatives, not least of all because they live in a relatively developed environment in which they are accustomed to the majority of decisions being taken by planning authorities through their elected local government representatives, and presume that any direct or indirect interests that they may have in the area will be taken account of accordingly.

With regards to tourist and recreational havens, a significant proportion of those that derive indirect benefit from such areas are visitors who often live a considerable distance away and cannot therefore be easily defined and targeted for participation, nor is their relatively ephemeral and superficial interest in the area sufficient to motivate them to participate proactively. The majority of the local community either simply live by the sea or have an interest largely confined to deriving an indirect living from it through the incoming recreationalists and tourists. However, if management decisions are taken that affect the freedom of visitors to recreate in the area in question and/or the ability of the local community to derive income from such visitors, then the affected communities are likely to choose to participate reactively: the management initiative in questions will be criticised for failing to provide for community participation in its preparation. Under such circumstances a more effective approach may be the involvement of national governing bodies and their local branches, combined with the provision of awareness-raising information concerning the reasons for and nature of any proposed voluntary management restrictions at launch points etc. in order to promote the collective responsibility of visiting recreationalists, though if this fails to overcome conflicts, statutory restrictions may need to be employed with all the financial implications associated with their administration and enforcement.

Indeed, in the second draft Exe Estuary Management Plan,²¹ which was produced following wider community participation exercises as previously discussed, it has been stated that if the voluntary approach to regulating recreational activities fails to overcome conflicts then a new administrative body will have to be created with powers greater than those proposed in the first draft, which was the subject of widespread criticism due to the lack of community participation in its preparation. However, reverting to such approaches will often lead to protests that the community, albeit diffuse and unorganised, is not adequately represented and is being subjected to a stringent regulatory approach. It could thus be argued that under such circumstances it would be too simplistic to attempt to avoid conflicts by correlating the degree of protest that a draft plan generates

with the degree of community participation that was employed in its preparation, as any given strategic management initiative is likely to provoke protests from any user groups whose activities might be restricted.

These arguments are put forward to illustrate that like many aspects of local coastal zone management initiatives, the approaches taken to promote community participation will be very dependent upon the demographic, economic, political, etc., characteristics of a given area, and that such characteristics need to be taken account of when comparing different initiatives. It is certainly as difficult to say that a given approach represents 'best practice' for promoting community participation, as it is to develop general indicators of the degree and success of community participation for application to different initiatives.

There is also an ongoing debate regarding the extent to which community participation, as currently practised, is particularly meaningful in that top-down regulatory powers are relinquished to or harnessed by the local communities, giving them real powers in relation to the formulation and implementation of management regimes. Current initiatives such as those reviewed are undoubtedly important in terms of increasing awareness, promoting, and gaining support for conservation measures, and enabling the participation of communities in determining the scope of the management initiative and the issues that will be addressed. It may be more accurate, however, to describe them as a form of public consultation, albeit one that represents a significant improvement on the traditional town and country planning approach.

Coastal management can only become a truly participatory process when it involves bottom-up approaches, including provision for the formulation and implementation of plans with the full and active participation of local communities. In order for this to take place, the approach whereby responsibility for local CZM is devolved to the lowest appropriate institutional level, so favoured by the UK government, would have to proceed to the level of local community empowerment. It is debatable whether the regulatory bodies will be politically willing to divest themselves of management authority and devolve this to local communities, or will provide for their management authority to be harnessed by local communities. In the context of the social, economic, and cultural climate that currently exists in the UK, one must also consider whether geographically integrated long-term strategic management objectives would be likely to be achieved were management authority to be entirely devolved to local communities, especially considering the potential for local short-term priorities, particularly those of dominant user groups, to override other interests.

These issues are raised not as a basis for arguing against community participation *per se*, but as a basis for arguing that a balance must be achieved between providing for meaningful community participation and achieving long-term strategic management objectives. However, it is also recognised that one of the main aims of any local CZM initiative is to raise the awareness of the local community in order to foster the potential for their collectively responsible participation in management initiatives in a manner that both provides for meaningful participation and achieves strategic long-term objectives. Also, as the examples reviewed in this paper indicate, carefully designed community participation programmes, particularly in the context of attempts to resolve estuary management conflicts, can play a crucial role in providing additional information, adding local experience and knowledge, minimising suspicion, increasing awareness, and promoting cooperation in their implementation.

An overall trend which emerges from the UK case studies is that current community participation exercises are generally of a relatively low profile in that the effort put into the outreach exercises is relatively limited and the number of resulting responses relatively small. This is consistent with the generally low expectancy amongst the public that they will be invited to meaningfully participate in natural resource management decision making processes, and the possible reasons why this may be the case is one of the issues that has been addressed by the EC funded VALCOAST study.²² As the other papers in this issue demonstrate, community participation in other countries involves a greater number of people and their involvement in the CZM process is arguably more significant than in the UK.

In developing countries such participation is essential as a greater proportion of coastal communities tend to rely to a larger extent on marine resources and 'top-down' regulatory approaches which do not take account of their needs and use patterns are unlikely to be effective. In countries such as Australia, America and Canada active citizen participation in decision making process is politically and culturally more ingrained and this, coupled with the relatively low population densities in many coastal areas, means that community participation programmes in such countries are often more widespread and generally provide for more meaningful involvement in CZM decision making processes. The UK, on the other hand, like many other European countries, has a long political history of command-and-rule which is culturally ingrained leading to a greater acceptance of 'top-down' regulatory approaches to natural resources management. Thus both the regulatory authorities and coastal communities are relatively unfamiliar with the concept of community participation, the former generally considering it to be a thorny issue, the

latter having low expectations with regards to the potential for their meaningful input to CZM decision making processes.

However, this attitude is slowly changing and the regulatory authorities are, as this paper demonstrates, cautiously exploring the potential of various techniques for enabling community participation, though many are currently restricting their efforts to 'key stakeholders', whilst coastal communities are becoming more aware of the potential for their reactive and, more importantly, proactive participation in decision making process. It remains to be seen whether this trend will continue and eventually provide for more meaningful participation involving a wider proportion of the community in CZM decision making processes.

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