

Exploring the Benefits of a Regional Approach to Coastal Coordination in North West England



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Regional Demonstration Project for the Coastal Partnerships Network Championing Coastal Coordination Project

Executive Summary

This case study forms a Regional Demonstration Project: '**Exploring the Benefits of a Regional Approach to Coastal Coordination in North West England**', which is one of a series of Regional Demonstration Projects taking place across England as part of the '**A National Framework Championing Coastal Coordination**' project led by Coastal Partnerships Network (CPN) and supported by the Championing Coastal Coordination (3Cs) fund .

Championing Coastal Coordination (3Cs) is an Environment Agency initiative with support from Natural England, the Marine Management Organisation and the Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities. It is a collaboration seeking to explore how to enhance and progress coordination for coastal sustainability and resilience in England.

The North West's Regional Demonstration Project is led by the North West Coastal Forum- a multi-sector, non-profit, partnership working together across boundaries to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits for coastal communities in North West England by promoting and helping to deliver integrated coastal zone management to secure the long-term sustainability of the North West coast. Established for over 20 years the Forum is well placed to test and evaluate the value of regional coastal coordination.

The North West's regional project is designed to explore perspectives on the benefits and opportunities of, and risks and challenges to, a regional approach to coastal coordination, including a review of the role and value of the North West Coastal Forum and the opportunities and challenges it faces. In addition, work has taken place to explore mechanisms around coastal information sharing.

Work undertaken included:

1. **NWCF Management Board and key stakeholder organisations review and workshop** to explore benefits / value / risks of regional coastal coordination mechanisms such as NWCF and any issues thrown up by the need for cross border governance with Scotland and Wales; discover any changes needed to ensure NWCF is fit for the future and collate thoughts on key questions to inform the development of the national framework.
2. **A collaborative coastal projects workshop** to bring together 3Cs projects and other coastal projects in the region and explore questions relating to 3Cs project deliverables – local, regional and national, and future opportunities for working better together.
3. **Piloting and testing the value of a 'What's Happening on the North West Coast' online resource** pulling together key policies and strategic plans, projects and partnerships.

The findings from all the work undertaken are summarised in the full Regional Demonstration Project report and given, in brief, below. Additional information, such as the What's Happening on the North West Coast online resource and the Collaborative Coastal Projects in North West England workshop presentations and workshop report are available to download from the North West Coastal Forum website at www.nwcoastalforum.org.uk.

Results

The **consensus is that there are many benefits to having strategic coordination across the region**. However, any organisation set up to deliver regional coordination **needs to have a very clear role and avoid duplication with the roles of other initiatives**. A major concern expressed by nearly all the respondents was the **need for sufficient resources** including staff capacity both of the delivery body and within bodies that might want to participate, and **funding issues for regional coordination**.

These messages are very much mirrored by the findings from the responses on the North West Coastal Forum and its continued role, which found that, despite the challenges posed by the ongoing lack of funding and the resulting loss of a hosting organisation 5 years ago, the **North West Coastal Forum continues to have a valid role** and to provide **a range of benefits for organisations** working in the North West, **particularly across the public sector**. The NWCF is a long-established body with a wealth of experience, knowledge, contacts and reputational trust to build upon and **provides good evidence of how a regional coordinating body can help realise the benefits of regional coastal coordination**. As a result of positive findings from the work undertaken for the 3Cs research in North West England the Board has gained renewed impetus in ensuring the Forum has a secure future and is actively pursuing mechanisms to make this happen

However, there are **many challenges to regional coastal coordination operating as effectively as it could**, and again the experience of the NWCF demonstrates this. Challenges include:

- Challenges for both are mostly **effective long-term resourcing** of a coordinating organisation with a dedicated, funded, staff member, be that the NWCF or another body.
- Any organisation set up to do regional coastal coordination must have a **very clear role** and avoid duplication with the roles of other initiatives.
- **The NWCF needs to be better resourced to maximise its value** to the region.
- The impact of external and uncontrollable factors - the history of the NWCF demonstrates extreme **vulnerability to a range of factors** including:
 - **Political whim** (national and local)
 - **Availability of funding** for bodies working at larger geographic scales, and other funding constraints
 - **Host organisation changes** such as reorganisation, changes to working practices, etc.

The **Collaborative Coastal Projects in North West England workshop** was well received, with **100% of the delegates deeming it either 'useful' or 'very useful' and expressing the wish to see a similar event run annually** or biennially.

The **development of a What's Happening on the North West Coast online resource was supported** by the majority of respondents (78%) although there was a low response rate to input information into the pilot report. As this was a new survey with people unsure of what the end product would be and how useful it might be to them this is not surprising, and future iterations would be expected to generate a far better response. However many noted that **ensuring it is up to date** and is in **easily accessible format** were essentials in terms of ongoing usability.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Regional – or strategic area – coastal coordination is supported in the North West and other areas across England in order to maximise the benefit to stakeholder organisations in those areas, including across national and administrative borders, and to provide stronger links with the emerging National Framework for Coastal Coordination, national Government and its delivery bodies.

Recommendation 2: Future rounds of 3Cs funding, and other streams of Government funding, should help to support regional coastal coordination, providing essential financial support to core services and helping to build capacity, certainty, and continuity in delivery over the long term.

Recommendation 3: In the North West of England the delivery body for regional coastal coordination should be the North West Coastal Forum.

Recommendation 4: The North West Coastal Forum actively seeks changes to the way it currently operates to provide more certainty and continuity of delivery going forward. This should include:

- a. Finding a hosting organisation or establishing as an independent charity
- b. Securing funding to employ an officer and support core activity such as responding to strategic consultations and keeping the website updated
- c. Developing a new business plan aligned to other key plans and strategies of key stakeholder organisations and delivery partners
- d. Securing funding to develop and deliver project work, in particular, to:
 - review and expand the What’s Happening Online Resource annually
 - bring together organisations delivering, or interested in, delivering collaborative coastal projects annually to showcase work being done, share lessons learnt and explore opportunities for future collaborative funding bids and project delivery.

