

# Social Justice in the Context of Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management: A Review of Policy and Practice

Technical Summary: FD2605

## Joint Defra / EA Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management R&D programme

### Background to R&D project

The policy framework within which flood and coastal erosion decisions are made has undergone a significant transformation in the last 10-15 years; influenced by both incremental changes in policy, and the catalytic influences of major floods. Where previous policy was dominated by a flood defence doctrine, it is now widely recognised that to achieve sustainable policies for flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM), flood defence needs to be supported by a number of non-structural risk management options.

Asking people to 'live with floods' requires a significantly different approach to FCERM and the practical reality of implementing policy, guidance, strategies and decision-tools at regional and local levels which embrace these principles is challenging. The embodiment of principles of sustainability and equity goals asks searching questions concerning whose definitions of *just*, *fair* and *equitable* FCERM count, the appropriate mix of state vs. individual responsibility and the ability of current decision processes and procedures to fully account for social justice and equity issues.

In such a 'reality driven' context, questions concerning the 'socially just' nature of decisions, and the processes by which decisions are made, are certain to arise especially where FCERM is about trade-offs in the distribution of funding across society - the aim being to provide the greatest gains for society as a whole whilst recognising the needs and rights of those individuals, households, businesses and communities at risk of flooding and coastal erosion. However, unlike other areas of policy, there have been very few analytical studies investigating what is a fair decision process or what makes for a fair decision outcome, hence the significance and timeliness of this research.

### Results of R&D project

This research examined the social justice principles embedded in government policy, guidance and practice towards FCERM. Secondly, it examined the fairness attitudes of key stakeholders towards FCERM at national, regional and local levels. Thirdly, it provides insights and recommendations on how fairness concerns highlighted by the research might be addressed in FCERM policy and practice in the future. Four case studies were used as detailed exemplars to cover urban and integrated drainage, flood management, coastal defence and coastal erosion.



The research concluded that there was a lack of consistency in social justice approaches. Utility principles are most widely used, but utility on its own can be problematic and targeting the vulnerable is critical and there needs to be a transparency of policy and decisions. There is no single model but a key output was a concise social justice framework. For FCERM to be considered fair, a balanced approach using the following three principles is required: **Utility:** 'Fair FCERM that seeks (process) and secures (outcome) the greatest risk reduction per unit input'; **Vulnerability:** 'Fair FCERM that prioritises the vulnerable in the decision process and targets resources in favour of the most vulnerable'; **Equality:** "Fair FCERM decisions are those that provide an equal opportunity for every citizen to have their risk managed in the decision process."

## R&D Outputs and their Use

The outputs will inform accounting for social justice concerns in FCERM. For example there must be an open and transparent account of the weight being applied to different social justice principles in policy, guidance and practice across the range of FCERM options; there needs to be a clear account of the trade-offs that are required in the balancing of requirements for national consistency with those for stakeholder engagement; and existing funding and appraisal models re-evaluated - particularly for those who have no equality of opportunity to access this decision process.

The framework provides a mechanism for systematically identifying and evaluating social justice issues within decision-making processes and procedures. More importantly the review and evaluation of decision outcomes with a social justice 'lens' will illustrate how social justice concerns are embedded in decision outcomes. This will make social justice less of a theoretical concept but more tangible in terms of monitoring outcomes and policy measures.

Applying social justice principles transparently and consistently (and seen to be so) will aid communication of the approach adopted and decision made.

This R&D Technical Summary relates to R&D Project FD2605 and the following R&D output:

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The above outputs may be downloaded from the Defra/EA Joint R&D FCERM Programme website ([www.defra.gov.uk/environ/fcd/research](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environ/fcd/research)). Copies are also available via the Environment Agency's science publications catalogue (<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/epages/eapublications.storefront>) on a print-on-demand basis.



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