

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment SPC

Minutes of Special Coastal Erosion Meeting

held on Thursday 22nd April 2021 at 14.30

The meeting was held remotely by Ms Teams software connection.

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Mary Farrell

Present: Cllr. Donal Kenny, Cllr. Jim Moore, Cllr. Maura Bell, Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Mr. John Somers (Construction Industry Federation) Ms. Karen Finigan (PPN Member), Ms. Mary Walsh (Business & Commercial), Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union), Carolyne Godkin, A/Director of Services, Gerry Forde Senior Engineer, Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, Brendan Cooney Senior Executive Scientist, George Colfer Executive Engineer, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Cliona Connolly Senior Staff Officer, Mr. Philip Knight Senior Staff Officer, Lillie O'Brien Assistant Staff Officer, Caroline Sinnott, Clerical Officer.

Apologies: Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Cllr. Tom Forde, Mr. Billy Murphy (PPN Member), Mr. James Brennan (Agriculture).

Cllr. Mary Farrell introduced the meeting, noting that coastal erosion is one of the most significant challenges facing the Council in relation to our environment with almost three-quarters of the County as coastline. The OPW sent apologies that they were unable to send a representative to the SPC meeting in response to an invite. It was agreed that to leave the adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting in February to the next meeting.

1. Introduction – Carolyn Godkin

Carolyn Godkin, Director of Service (DOS) gave a brief outline of the overall position concerning the coastline of Wexford with 211km of the 260Km coast consisting of soft coastline (81%). She informed the meeting of the number of Blue Flag (7) and Green Coast Beaches (9) and that there were 4,355 properties within 200 metres of the coast. Details of various studies and reports completed with regard to coastal erosion were given together with an outline of the various presentations that would feature at the meeting. She stated that the OPW is aware that Wexford is a high-risk county for coastal erosion given the length of soft coastline.

2. Climate Change and Coastal Zone Impact – Brendan Cooney

Brendan Cooney gave a presentation on Climate Change and the impact on the Coastal Zone in Co. Wexford, outlining the potential effects of increased sea levels. He stated that last year a drone was purchased, and surveys were carried out on the 260km of Wexford coastline. The drone footage was provided to the Geological Survey of Ireland with whom the Council is working regarding mapping a coastal vulnerability index. It is hoped they will complete all the Wexford Coastline by next year. Climate change is having a huge impact and the Council must prioritise certain vulnerable areas of coastline for attention.

3. Case Studies – George Colfer and Gerry Forde

George Colfer presented some case studies, examples of high-risk areas of erosion and studies carried out in recent years such as at Kilpatrick where access to 3 houses on a private road was lost. The beach is in a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) therefore it is difficult to get approval to carry out any protection works.

Courtown Beach was another example, where significant erosion has taken place over many years and the Blue Flag for the Beach has now been lost. Details of efforts to try to re-establish the beach were presented. A Feasibility Study was completed in 2020 and the project has been taken over by Special Projects Section where a source of funding might be secured to bring in sand for beach nourishment and progress the project to detailed design and a planning approval process for an offshore breakwater and other works.

Gerry Forde presented a case study on Donaghmore Beach, where emergency funding from the OPW was received in 2016 to carry out coastal protection works to help save the public road and the cemetery. Keating's Cottage at Ballyconnigar, destroyed due to erosion, was also featured. In Rosslare, rock groynes were constructed in the 1990's and they succeeded in preventing further erosion. A major study has been completed and works including rock groynes, rock protection, dune restoration and a flood barrier on the western side of the Rosslare spit will be constructed to help prevent further erosion. The cost will be €7 to 8 million to complete but the Council is confident in getting funding. Funding approval has been received to progress coastal protection at Seaview which is a special area for conservation.

George Colfer also outlined case studies at Hook Head, Grange and Carnivan Beaches, locations where coastal protection works that the Council hope to carry out were outlined. He also stated that a solution has been designed to upgrade the existing protection at the road leading out to Hook Head. Although there is no funding available this year it will continue to be monitored.

4. Overview of Municipal Districts

George Colfer gave a detailed overview on the infrastructure, ongoing works and areas of concern in the **Gorey/Kilmuckridge MD**. He also spoke about the environmental designations and the 371 properties within a 200m of coast from Kilmichael to Courtown and the plan of action for each area. This Coastline involved started at Kilmichael to Courtown and then to Cahore, Ballinamona and Ballinesker.

Gerry Forde gave a detailed overview of the 45km coastline in the **Wexford MD** which includes the Harbour Estuary. Visual, GPS and Drone surveys are continuing to be carried out at Ballinesker and Raven Forest and also at North Slob which is a vulnerable location. Dune restoration work has also been completed at Ballinesker. There is a Flood Protection Scheme planned for Wexford Town costing €9.4m that the Special Projects team are progressing this it could be 2029 before it will be completed.

Gerry also gave a detailed overview of **Rosslare MD** which has a coastline of 100km long from Drinagh to Wellingtonbridge including Rosslare Harbour, Carnsore Point, Ballyhealy, Kilmore Quay, Cullenstown and Bannow Island.

George Colfer presented an overview of the coast in the New Ross MD from Wellingtonbridge to Fethard to Hook Head and to Ballyhack. He stated that several schemes are being progressed and that dune restoration and management are being looked at and funding has been sought for dune restoration in Morriscastle.

Some areas will not be viable to undertake protection works but the Council will be seeking to determine where works might be feasible.

Gerry Forde also pointed out that at Kilpatrick Wexford Co. Council spent over €100,000 on consultants' reports and as a solution was not possible without impacting on the SAC, the Council could not proceed with the work, something the Council could face in other areas. He mentioned that a village called Fairbourne in Wales that may be abandoned over next 20 years due to rising sea levels. Ongoing monitoring of coastal locations through the various Municipal Districts will continue through visual, GPS and drone surveys. He also stated that Piers and Harbours were not included in the presentations as they are well protected. He will raise the matter at a future SPC Meeting.

A discussion ensued after the presentations and the following queries were raised by the Committee Members and responded to by the Staff present.

- A query was raised about the figures that were given by Carolyn Godkin in the presentation and the nature of the properties.
The response was there were 4,355 properties, a mix of domestic and commercial within the 200m from coast around the County. The Council would have to look at cost benefit analysis for each case. The Council is looking at each case individually in the areas of concern.
- It was observed that the County has so many SAC's and it seems that it's being penalised for having them. This is a critical issue that the Council seems to be prepared to sacrifice people's homes and livelihoods based on a decision on a SAC. The response was if the SACs are lost then the biodiversity will also be lost and this will exacerbate climate change. At present the Council is looking at each situation case by case and government bodies are recognising that consistency and clarity are needed they will be producing documents for any proposed scheme. Other countries in Europe are more advanced and recognising that it is the cost of rising sea levels along with coastal erosion is compounding the problem, so the Council have to look at proposed solutions for the long term.
- Another query asked about the timescale involved in the Rosslare Project.
The response was that in 2016 the Council submitted a short report and were asked to submit a full consultant's report on the project. It is now hoped to start construction in 2022. The solution includes building rock groynes, rock protection, dune restoration and beach nourishment to protect the beach. Rock revetment can vary in cost between €1,000 to €3,000 per metre. It was noted that the OPW is a good organisation to deal with, for example the Seaview report only went up in February and approval was received in 7/8 weeks.
- A question was asked how much would be required to spend on necessary works along the County's coastline?
The Response that there was a 2011 report that identified coastal erosion risk zones and it would cost many tens of millions of Euro for all the required protection works in Co. Wexford. The Rosslare Project is expected to cost around €7 to 8 m.
- A further query noted European examples where areas might be abandoned to the sea. How are such policies to protect or not decided?
- The Inter Department Coastal Change Management Strategy Group was established by the Government early 2020 and their job is the development of an integrated whole of government coastal change management strategy. Economics and cost benefit analysis comes into play. A large portion of tourism is based on sandy beaches and will form part of how we deal with coastal erosion. Concerns have been raised for a number of years about the OPW about slow response time to get funding and the process is very slow a new strategy is needed, and the Council is dealing with the situation on a case by case.

- A question was raised about the Inner harbour and around Ardcahan is it considered coastal and if so, were there any areas of concern?
The response was that Special Projects Section are taking a lead and looking at coastal flooding and other areas such as Ardcahan Beach to Maudlintown would be looked at by George Colfer and the Environment Team.
There is a current planning application in the Ferrybank area, and they are including coastal protection work in the design. Certain developers that want to build in parts of the town are putting in coastal protection in as part of their schemes.
- A query was raised about Planning Permissions granted but not built around Wexford Town and if all the 4,355 properties were at risk.
The response was that under the current County Development Plan, it is prohibited to build within 200m of a soft shoreline unless upgrading an existing derelict house or where there is existing coastal protection. Between Planning and Environment, coastal erosion was recognised as an important issue it was agreed to refuse planning permission with the 200m zone. Not all of the 4,355 properties identified are at risk.
- Another question was asked about strengthening an area by 200m of coast, is that just shifting the problem down the line and compromising areas and how do we decide on it?
The response was that regarding the groynes in Rosslare Beach in protecting it, the Council had to go out further with the groynes but had to be careful in designing that didn't go out too far to enable the sand to be trapped.
- In relation to the long-term issue we are facing why would we encourage people build near the coastline?
- The response was any hard engineering like rock armour or seawalls will always have an effect and that is why OPW, when carrying out public schemes they insist on carrying out over a wider area to ensure no significant impact on adjacent coasts. Some places where rock armour has been put in, the erosion has exacerbated at the end and that's why further studies to minimise impact are carried out. Most of them will be tapered back into the coast.

Cllr. Mary Farrell stated that there are huge funding implications and that the Council is dependent on securing funding from the OPW and other sources. She complimented Gerry Forde, George Colfer and the Environment team on the presentations.

Carolyne Godkin thanked the SPC and said that there was a huge amount of work involved in getting the presentations together. The pace of erosion in some areas is greater than predicted so the Council faces a huge challenge. Great time and effort are put into preparing reports for the OPW in order to secure funding for projects. A positive reply from the OPW for Seaview is a testament to that. The Council looks forward to the strategy from the Inter-departmental Group and hopefully the OPW will come and engage with Wexford County Council when it is completed.

Gerry Forde stated that the presentation will be made available today in report form for future record. He thanked Brendan Cooney and Philp Knight for the drone footage and Mark Mitchell in IT.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed: *Mary Farrell*
Cathaoirleach

Date: *3rd Sept 2021*