

Maritime Forum Soapbox Session – Robin Toogood

A very brief soapbox – from my perspective as Manager for South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where we have 60 miles of coastline and six estuaries.....

This is an exciting and important time for coastal and maritime management.

- The prospect of a Marine Bill
- Marine protected areas
- Some direction on Integrated Coastal Zone Management
- A maritime spatial planning system
- The possibility of new legislation delivering better coastal access
- The review of the Shoreline Management Plan
- The roll-out of the water framework directive
- The catchment sensitive farming initiative

Having robust and effective coastal partnerships in place is going to be really important as we embrace these initiatives and apply them locally.

The (relatively) recently established Devon Maritime Forum can give a valuable strategic framework for engagement at the County level.

My concern is that some of the local estuary partnerships that have underpinned successful coastal partnership working over recent years have come under acute pressure. After some 12 years of valuable local work, the Dart Estuary Environmental Management Project was wound up at the end of August with the closure of the office and the loss of the estuary officer and assistant. Work is in progress to endeavour to put our estuary management project on the Salcombe Estuary on a more secure financial footing. Although valued and well-regarded locally, estuary partnerships have often been run on a shoestring. It is a long standing paradox that partnerships dedicated to sustainable coastal management have themselves proved so difficult to sustain.

This is not a whinge. And it is not a criticism of funding partners who are doing the best they can under very difficult circumstances. It's just that we are all having to face the challenge of making our coastal partnerships effective and sustainable and being clearer about the benefits they yield. We are working to identify new sources of funding, including private sponsorship. But it is an uncertain future and it is important that a meeting of the Devon Maritime Forum is aware of this context.

There are two initiatives underway which are seeking to explore future options and directions. One is a review of estuary partnerships being undertaken for the Devon Maritime Forum steering group which will report its findings shortly. The other is the study of the "Financial Benefits of Coastal Partnerships" being undertaken by ENTEC on behalf of Defra, the Local Government Association and Coastal Partnerships Working Group and I am pleased to see that one of the afternoon workshops today is dedicated to this latter project.