

# **Environment and Sustainability Committee**

## **E&S(4)–21–12 paper 3**

### **Inquiry into coastal protection – Paper from the Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology and Science**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to set out written evidence to the Environment and Sustainability Committee in relation to their inquiry into Coastal Protection in Wales.

#### **2. Summary**

- 2.1. This paper outlines the importance of the Coastal Environment to Welsh tourism and provides information on activity undertaken by my tourism officials and our partners to maximise the value of the Coastal Environment to the Welsh visitor economy.

#### **3. Background**

- 3.1. The coastal environment is one of the most important features for tourism in Wales. In contrast to other GB destinations, trips to seaside/ coast dominate the Welsh holiday market at 44 % followed by village/ countryside at 26% (Source: GTBS 2011).
- 3.2. My officials have been working to get Wales's coastal environment recognised internationally as one of the best in Europe for the quality of its beaches, conservation and management of its biodiversity and the quality of its sea water. These positive associations can be used to promote Wales as a destination for coastal tourism.
- 3.3. In terms of coastal erosion, some of our culturally significant sites are located in areas at risk of flooding and/ or erosion. Natural and constructed tourist sites such as coastal paths, nature reserves, monuments and beaches are in at-risk areas.
- 3.4. Although my department is not directly developing programmes targeting coastal erosion and risks of flooding, it is leading on the sustainable development of the coastline and investing in the infrastructure, leisure facilities, quality and sustainable management.
- 3.5. My officials work in close partnership with the regeneration department (Housing, Regeneration and Heritage) to ensure tourism developments within the coastal regeneration areas contribute to and support the overall strategic objectives of the sector. We continue to work jointly through the

current regeneration review to ensure tourism plays a key strategic role in the future policy direction of seaside resort regeneration

#### **4. Coastal Tourism Strategy**

4.1. The Welsh Government's Coastal Tourism Strategy was launched in December 2008 and sets out a common strategy for the development of coastal tourism, which realises and builds on the economic potential of the coastline of Wales, whilst respecting its environmental quality and recognising the importance of achieving community benefits. Coastal Tourism, in particular, is highly dependent on the quality of the natural environment and cultural distinctiveness of Wales - qualities which can be destroyed if poorly planned or managed. The natural environment can also be a driving force for the preservation and promotion of these qualities through raising awareness and indirectly by providing an economic justification for investment. The coastal tourism strategy directly addresses the challenges of developing coastal tourism in a sustainable way in order to achieve economic, environmental and social benefits.

#### **5. Green Sea Partnership (GSP)**

5.1. The aim of the Green Sea Partnership (GSP) is to achieve co-ordinated practical action to sustainably improve the quality of our coastal environment, focusing on bathing water and beach quality and the safe use of our beaches.

5.2. Since its launch in May 1996, the partnership has encouraged the up take of the existing codes of conduct and marine codes in operation in Wales and has achieved considerable success in improving the quality of Wales' coastline and increasing the number of award winning beaches in Wales. For 2012 the Wales achieved the following beach awards:-

- 43 Blue Flag beaches,
- 5 Blue Flag marinas,
- 51 Green Coast Awards,
- more than 100 Seaside Awards.

5.3. In 2010, two coastal authorities were selected to drive forward the Green Sea Project on behalf of all the coastal authorities in Wales. This project now forms part of the overall Environment for Growth (E4G) Convergence Coastal Tourism Project.

#### **6. Environment for Growth – Coastal Tourism and Sustainable Tourism**

6.1. The aim of the two EU projects on Coastal Tourism and Sustainable Tourism is to invite residents and visitors alike to improve their health,

reduce stress and learn about all aspects of the environment by taking advantage of national outdoor assets.

6.2. As part of the approvals process, all “Centre of Excellence” proposals were subject to consultation with the Environment Agency Wales (EAW) and Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) regarding planning and regulations affecting coastal developments (i.e. Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Special Areas of Conservation), EU environmental habitat protection and other related policies.

6.3. Visit Wales is continuing to work with the project leads, EAW, CCW and Local Authorities in terms of policies relating to Shoreline Management Plans and the planned Marine Conservation Zones in Wales.

6.4. The focus for the Coastal Tourism project is to develop high quality watersports and activity tourism products around the coast, encouraging more sustainable recreation, integrating sustainable transport and improving the environmental management. The project has supported three key Centres of Excellence (CoEs) on the Welsh coast:-

- Trust in Aberdaron (National Trust)
- Pembrokeshire Coastal Waters Centre (Pembrokeshire)
- Swansea Bay Water Sports Centre (Swansea)

6.5. The objective of the Green Sea Coastal Improvement Programme (part of the E4G Coastal Tourism Project) is to ensure the quality of beaches - around the coast of the Convergence area of Wales - is maintained and improved in order to meet growing visitor expectations. The programme is designed to enhance the quality of the visitor experience at Welsh beaches through:

- Developing the natural environment through improved access and enjoyment;
- The provision/improvement of appropriate infrastructure, facilities, access – (i.e. car parking, access paths, visitor information, interpretation, toilets and environmental facilities etc);
- Monitoring activities;
- Encouragement of ‘Sense of Place’; and
- Interpretation and Sense of Place - supported by an improvement in the provision of information and interpretation.

## **7. The Tourism Investment Support Scheme (TISS)**

7.1. The objective of TISS is to stimulate increased demand from new and existing markets by encouraging capital investment projects aimed at improving the quality of facilities. Any investment in tourism projects via

TISS is subject to planning permission and wider consultation with Local Authorities. Welsh Government is reliant on coastal protection issues being taken into account by Local Authorities or National parks where appropriate at the planning stage.

## **8. Coastal Access and the Wales Coast Path**

8.1. The Welsh Government Coastal Access Improvement Programme (CAIP) aims to improve existing coastal rights of way, develop new routes and ensure access from many user groups including cyclists, disabled people and horse riders. In May 2012 the all Wales Coast Path was launched and has resulted in a significant media response both in the UK internationally.

8.2. My department chairs the Wales Coast Path marketing and communications group. Additional joint work is underway in terms of facilitating circular routes that allow people to head inland and link to towns and villages, bringing economic benefits to Welsh rural communities.

## **9. Other partnership activities:**

9.1. Keep Wales Tidy - developing a dedicated website to encourage more sustainable management of the coast. The website will include key information on beach profiles, marine heritage, biodiversity, accessibility and wider sustainable coastal management. Supporting Coastcare Groups, which empower local communities, encouraging them to take ownership of certain areas including beaches. There are currently 136 groups operating along the Welsh coast

9.2. The Coastal Communities Toolkit - help beach managers develop and deliver a more sustainable approach to coastal management, events and activities on and around the coast as well as key environmental information coastal activity.

9.3. Tourism and Climate Report - Visit Wales commissioned a report in 2010 to look at the impacts of climate change on the tourism industry in Wales. Phase 2 of the study will be commissioned in 2012 and identify key impacts for the industry and practical recommendations for future proofing tourism development in the future.

9.4. Development of factsheets and support for businesses on climate change including flooding, future proofing and erosion.

9.5. Tourism Recreational Audit and Toolkit - The South West Wales Recreational Audit is a useful guide to identifying tourism pressure points and volumes of activities around the coast. An online toolkit has been

developed on the back of this so other regions can benefit from the work and develop a similar approach to sustainable coastal monitoring and management.