



Earth in crisis: environmental policy in an international context

What is Managed Realignment?

Ian Lewis

On the southern side of the island, that's where a lot of managed realignment approaches are being taken. So what we're looking at there is to actually let certain parts of it inundate, build more sustainable and shorter defence lines further back inland.

Commentary

The policy of managed realignment allows certain areas of the coast to flood in order to save other parts of the coast, usually the more densely populated areas. This is happening on Elmley Marshes, an internationally designated site and nature reserve, home to rare breeds of birds.

Alison Giacomelli

The RSPB is very concerned about the outcomes of the Shoreline Management Plan because huge amounts of managed realignment is proposed in the Shoreline Management Plan and our view is that we need to prioritise more on where to do the managed realignment avoiding the areas that are the best freshwater sites. Elmley is the most important site for breeding waders that use the freshwater habitat. We recognise that we can't protect Elmley forever in the face of sea level rise and climate change, but we think that other sites that are less important should be realigned over first and we protect Elmley for as long as we can.

Rachael Hill

In the past our response to flooding has always been to raise the walls, build flood defences and hard engineering structures higher and higher. But all we're doing is managing the probability, the likelihood of a flood. But we can't prevent all flooding. We need to look to the future, try and understand how water levels are going to change and look at other ways of managing those increasing water levels. Because a flood defence can be overtopped and it can also be breached and we don't want that water taking people by surprise. Our job is to make sure people are safe and also that people understand that in future floods are going to be increasing.

Andrew Pearce

As a country, as a society we now accept that climate change is a reality and that sea levels are going to rise and we have the choice really between planned adaptation and forced adaptation. Through the Shoreline Management Plan we are looking to develop policies that will keep our options open for the full length of the planning process – 100 years. If we don't use that planning time wisely we may find ourselves forced into more drastic and dramatic actions.

Tim O'Riordan

When you have a wealthy country like the United Kingdom, it can put huge resources into dealing with coastal change and with river change and adaptation. And right now the projection is roughly £1 billion per year by the year 2012 will be spent on adaptation to some aspects of climate change or another, which is in British terms, quite a small figure. When you go to a country like Bangladesh, then you have about a third of the whole population which is susceptible to a relatively small change in sea level, less than half a metre. And right now the amount of money available for proactive adaptation is preciously little compared with the need for that. So what is happening in Britain is a microcosm of a much larger case, and even we don't do it well in terms of cost and benefits, but it's nothing like what it's like in the poor countries.