

ESCALATE: Summary of headline results from the Romney Marsh case study

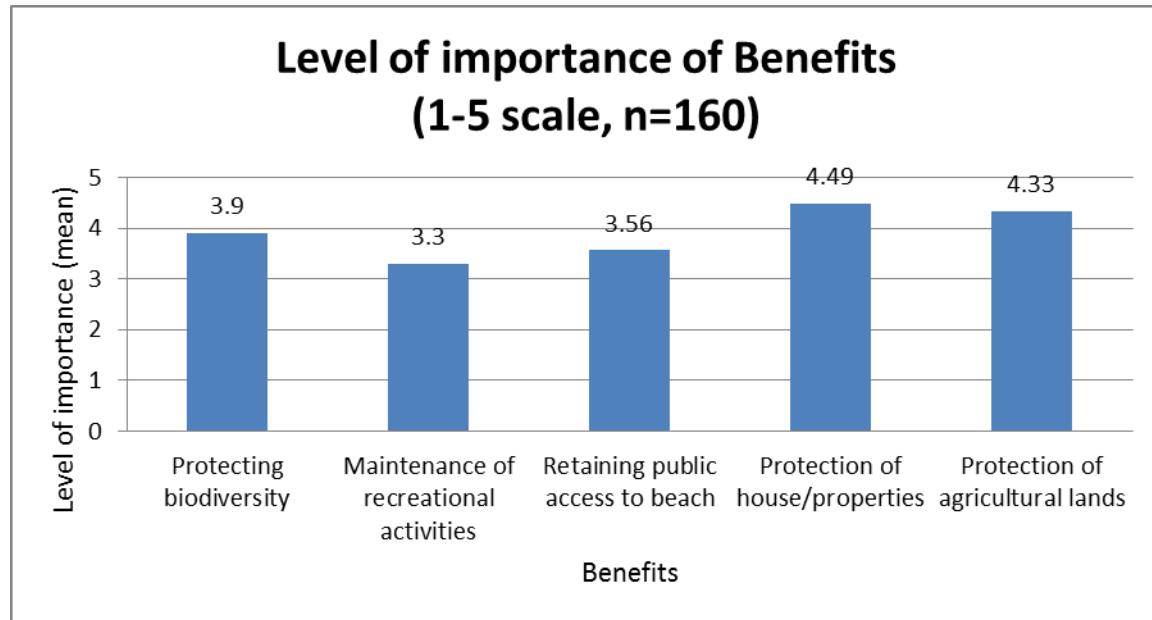
Romney Marsh is situated in south-east England. The proposed strategy for the management of the coast here is to ‘hold-the-line’ by maintaining and improving existing defences, with some minor local realignment taking place. A structured questionnaire was designed and distributed randomly to a sample of households (n=1000). The response rate was approximately 16%, resulting in 160 completed questionnaires.

Perceptions on proposed coastal management policies

Respondents were asked to comment on two possible management scenarios for their locality. The first scenario proposed to ‘Hold the Line’, by maintaining current defences and constructing new ones were necessary. The second option was to allow a ‘managed retreat’ of the coast in certain parts of Romney Marsh. Data showed respondents were more in favour of the ‘Hold-the-Line’ (HTL) option. Specifically, respondents were asked to state their level of agreement on a 5 point Likert scale (5 representing the highest level of agreement). In the HTL option the level of agreement was 3.6, whereas for Managed Realignment (MR) the level of agreement was 2.19.

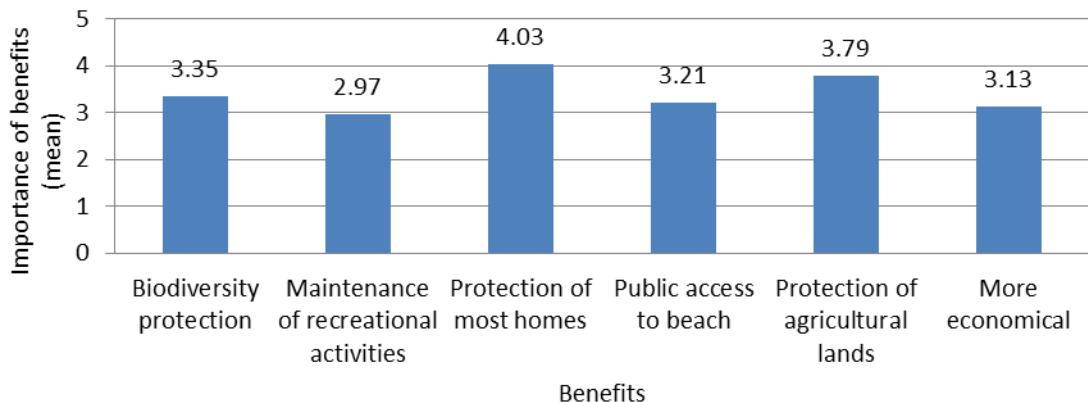
For each of these options respondents were asked to evaluate their benefits on a 5 point scale with higher scores representing higher evaluated benefits. For HTL the most important benefit was ‘property protection’, followed by ‘protecting agricultural land’ (Graph 1). For the MR option, the most important benefit was ‘protection of homes’, followed by ‘protecting agricultural land’ (Graph 2).

Graph 1. Benefits of the ‘Hold the Line’ option (measured on 5 point scale)



Graph 2. Benefits of the ‘Managed Realignment’ option (measured on a 5 point scale)

Importance of benefits (scale: 1-5, n=160)



Social capital measurement

Respondents were asked to evaluate on a 10 point Likert scale their perception of community social capital in the study area, and the levels of trust they had in organizations with specific coastal management responsibilities. The most trusted organization was the Environment Agency (5.94), followed by Natural England (4.66) and local District Councils (4.59). Generalized trust in local community institutions dealing with coastal management issues was scored at 4.40. Concerning respondents' preparedness to become involved in coastal management issues, 59% of respondents declared that they would be willing to take part in a consultation process for coastal management in their area. However, only 4.4% already participated in a local coastal defense action group. Finally, concerning the level of reciprocity, 82.3% of the sample stated that they considered their neighbours would help them if their house was in danger of flooding, with 88.5% stating they believed family members would help them in this situation.

Conclusions

The Romney Marsh case study showed a marked community preference for the 'hold the line' option. This is clearly influenced by respondents' desire to protect property they live in or depend upon (eg. agricultural land), and which determines their economic livelihoods as prime realizable assets or by setting the level of recurrent insurance premiums. Respondents also vested relatively high levels of trust in the Environment Agency, arising from ongoing beach replenishment and coastal defence repair works undertaken by the Agency in and around the Marsh which is visible to local residents on a daily base. However, despite over half the sample stating they would be willing to participate in coastal management activities, the actual level of participation in coastal action groups is very low. These findings provide a useful basis for future research given that impacts from sea level rise are expected to increase in Romney Marsh. Indeed, it is possible that in the future a reconsideration of current policies may be necessary. From our results, it is evident that the Environment Agency should continue to have a central role in coordinating coastal management policy locally, in collaboration with District and Parish Councils. Nonetheless, local community involvement in policy decision-making and decision-taking must be improved through expanding the role and remit of local social networks. For example, further deliberation techniques could be implemented, to better incorporate local knowledge into future policy decisions on coastal management.