



A BASE-Analysis of Adaptation in Coastal Areas – What can EU Policies do?

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ABSTRACT

The EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (COM(2013) 216 final) recognizes coastal areas as vulnerable. The strategy identifies coastal flooding and erosion as key issues of concern. The strategy envisions funding through the Life+ instrument to support trans-boundary coastal management, emphasizing densely populated deltas and coastal cities, and stresses climate proofing through policy integration. For coastal regions, this means e.g. an explicit recognition of climate change in the proposal for a directive on Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Management (COM(2013) 133 final) and in planned guidelines on adaptation and coastal zone management (2014). This paper analyses the conditions for policy integration in coastal areas based on documentary analysis of relevant policy documents and reflection on selected cases. It specifically examines the most important challenges to adaptation and asks to what extent current and envisioned European legislation is able to deal with the key vulnerabilities and adaptation needs. Does the European legislation provide regulatory instruments that can effectively address the most pressing questions that the strategy has identified, or is the role of European policies mainly to raise awareness? Awareness raising supports risk assessment and management, but in addition we suggest that coastal adaptation is critically dependent on integrated land use planning, a matter for which EU does not have competence. Progress therefore depends heavily on Member States' actions and policies. To be effective, EU legislation has two main options: either develop various ways of indirect regulation of land use or provide incentives for Member States to adopt sustainable land use. The approach of the adaptation strategy is a combination of the two. Its success is likely to depend on the ability to achieve synergistic effects, which in turn requires flexibility to deal with the diversity of the conditions along Europe's coasts.