

Joint Defra / EA Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management R&D programme

Background to R&D project

Defra's Making Space for Water strategy aims at putting *people* and the environment at the centre of policy making and to deliver the greatest economic and social benefits consistent with the Government's sustainable development principles. In parallel with this, the current Corporate Strategy of the Environment Agency - "*Creating a Better Place*" - has the objective of enabling people to achieve a "Better quality of life". In order to achieve these goals of putting people first a better understanding of people, society and social issues is crucial.

It was in that context that this project was commissioned to firstly, examine what the current approach to the social sciences was within FCERM R&D and secondly, to provide some tools to help build capacity for social sciences within FCERM. This project ran from January 2007 – March 2008 and had five interrelated objectives:

Objective 1: Develop a vision and facilitate development of a draft strategy for social science research within the FCERM R&D programme for the next five years in a way that builds on the understanding of social science research practices, and the institutional capacity to apply these, from the outset.

Objective 2: Develop practical understanding and application of social science research practices within the context of the four themes of the new FCERM R&D programme.

Objective 3: Build institutional capacity for social science research practices by developing and working with a network of 'social science champions'.

Objective 4: Make recommendations to embody the emerging understandings of social science research practice, and proposals within relevant strategy, policy and guidance documents

Objective 5: Evaluate the whole project and establish a process to ensure post-project sustainability

Results of R&D project

The research project provided the building blocks for embedding social sciences in FCERM R&D. Through collaborative research and a focus on capacity building the project has developed a vision statement for the social sciences in FCERM R&D together with a series of recommendations to achieve that vision. The findings of the research cover three key areas:

1. Direction- Vision and theme narratives: setting out a vision statement for social sciences in FCERM R&D together with "narratives" suggesting what social sciences might be appropriate for the four different themes within FCERM R&D.

2. Approach - Strategy and resources: focussing on the "how" of developing social sciences in FCERM R&D including suggestions for approaches to embedding social sciences and examples of possible approaches. These include a training seminar and a CD of resources developed as part of the project.



3. Evaluation: Reviewing experience: A key part of this project has been discussion of evaluation, in terms of how can social sciences research be meaningfully evaluated. The project also reviews the key aspects of an evaluation framework.

We have produced a series of detailed **recommendations** including the following examples:

- Recommendations for embedding the social sciences and more cross-disciplinary working, including working across FCERM R&D themes.
- Suggested approaches to building both in-house social sciences research expertise and further links with research organisations. We also recommend establishing a series of structures to facilitate access to social science knowledge and expertise, sharing of research results and collaboration with other organisations. To complement this we suggest examples of appropriate resources, e.g. CDs, CPD, etc.
- Recommendations to promote evaluation through benefit tracking incorporating the framework developed within this project and using the results of the evaluation as part of a learning system.
- Recommendations for further research including joint research with other agencies, long term evaluation of research and a project focused on enabling collaborative/cross-disciplinary working.

R&D Outputs and their Use

The research has produced a vision for the social sciences in FCERM R&D and has translated this vision into a narrative for each of the four R&D themes (SPD, IMCE, MAR and SAM). The vision and narratives should be discussed and taken into account by the Theme Advisory Groups when making decisions about new research.

In order to achieve the vision, the research also provides recommendations for a strategy based on capacity building and gives specific examples such as the use of case examples, a format for a training seminar, which could be repeated and a CD of social sciences resources. One of the recommendations from the project is that the resources CD is networked and become part of an intranet where it can be accessed by relevant staff and also updated.

The project also provides a framework for evaluating the quality of research which can be used to evaluate any future social science research or indeed any other research.

This R&D Technical Summary relates to R&D Project FD2604 and the following R&D outputs:

R&D Technical Report FD2604/TR – Supporting the Development of a Social Science Strategy for FCERM R&D: Social Science within FCERM Research: Practice and Future Prospects.

R&D Technical Report FD2604/TR2 – Current Approaches to social sciences in FCERM R&D 2006/7, Published March 2008.

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The above outputs may be downloaded from the Defra/EA Joint R&D FCERM Programme website (www.defra.gov.uk/environ/fcd/research). Copies are also available via the Environment Agency's science publications catalogue (<http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/epages/eapublications.storefront>) on a print-on-demand basis.

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