

# Towards sustainable estuary management

No. 329 - English Nature Research Reports



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No. 329

**Towards Sustainable Estuary Management**

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# PREFACE

Estuary Partnerships established during English Nature's Estuaries Initiative are expected to last beyond the formal life of the Initiative, depending on their effectiveness in providing a mechanism for co-ordinated estuary-wide management. As part of the transition from the Estuaries Initiative to wholly independent groups, a review was commissioned to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership approach and to make recommendations on possible ways forward. This report represents the consultants findings arising from telephone and face to face interviews, and a series of workshops.

The Review was funded by English Nature, the Environment Agency and the RSPB. It was overseen by a Steering Group comprising:

Association of Sea Fisheries Committees  
British Ports Association  
English Nature  
Environment Agency  
Local Government Association  
RSPB  
UK Major Ports Group  
The Wildlife Trusts/WWF

It is important to remember that a review of this nature makes heavy demands on consultees whose contribution is essential. The Steering Group would therefore like to thank everyone who has contributed to the process and hope that the report findings will be useful and will stimulate further debate on possible ways forward.

The Steering Group met twice immediately following completion of the contract and produced an initial response which accompanies this preface. This response is intended to serve as a foreword to the Review report.

# **Initial Steering Group response to the Review of the English Nature Estuaries Initiative Partnerships**

## **Background**

This paper:

- arises from debate within the Steering Group on the report and issues arising;
- represents the views of the Steering Group members and not necessarily their organisations.

The report's definition of estuary management refers to a spectrum of planning and management activities. In this context it sought to evaluate the successes and failures of the English Nature Estuaries Initiative and to make recommendations on possible ways of promoting sustainable estuary management.

## **Key points:**

### **Progress/achievements**

1. Evidence from the study suggested that estuary projects have had variable success in influencing policies for estuarine and coastal areas. However, it is probably too early to judge their overall success in this respect as some have yet to have had the opportunity to influence the planning process. In some cases much of the role of the partnerships originally envisaged by the Estuaries Initiative has been overtaken by other voluntary and statutory initiatives.
2. Most estuary projects have found their most appropriate home in local government (although there are also good examples of close links to Harbour Authorities, where these act as the management body for the whole or greater part of an estuary). The seniority of representation on EM steering and management groups was identified as a useful indicator of local commitment and support for projects; more successful projects tend to engage more senior representation.
3. There seemed to be an important distinction between estuaries of different size. Evidence suggested that in smaller estuaries plan preparation and the necessary small-scale implementation measures could be delivered under the EN model. However, in bigger estuaries with many users and pressures, the important role was in co-ordination of an overall plan to accommodate the plans or projects of all players in a sustainable way - this has met with less than universal success.
4. The steering group accepted the report's finding that the need for and role of project officers under the EN initiative model was highly site-dependent. In many cases they had been a useful, or even necessary, means of achieving the essential co-ordination. However, the voluntary authority of Project Officers was not sufficient to achieve integration of plans and projects on many estuaries.

5. Since the establishment of the Estuaries Initiative, changes in legislation and advances in coastal zone management have changed the planning climate in which estuary management plans work. Such developments range from non-statutory Estuary Shoreline Management Plans and Local Environment Agency Plans to statutory Management Schemes under the Habitats Regulations and the introduction of PPG20. Estuary management projects set up under the EN Estuaries Initiative have in many places served an important role in the approach adopted in later undertakings, but they have not been directly instrumental in their development. As Estuary Management Partnerships are not in themselves implementation vehicles, these new developments provide additional mechanisms for making implementation possible.

### **Limitations**

6. The study demonstrated how difficult it is to quantify outputs from projects whose main roles are co-ordination and not implementation. The evidence collected did not lend strong support for the Estuaries Initiative's direct achievements. However, it did indicate that there are important but unquantifiable benefits from the partnerships created and the increased awareness of estuary-related issues.
7. EN style Estuary Management Plans were misnamed in so far as they never had the powers or resources to manage estuaries. What most of them aimed to do was to provide a forum to co-ordinate the plans of other users and authorities with the objective of ensuring that human use and development were sustainable.

### **Future work**

8. The steering group felt strongly that there is a need for a systematic mechanism for national, regional and local co-ordination of activities affecting estuaries, given the wide range of existing statutory and non-statutory plans.
9. The Steering Group therefore recommend that a review is undertaken to establish how this mechanism for co-ordination might be brought about. Such a review would take into account the planning and administrative changes introduced since the Estuaries Initiative (LEAPS, SMPs, PPG20, Regional Assemblies etc). Such a review should also examine the need for nationally applied best practice and whether this should be delivered through statutory or non-statutory means. The Steering Group concluded that such a review should be explored through a working group set up under the auspices of the DETR Coastal Forum.
10. The Group recognised that many of the issues which need to be addressed are also relevant to the management of the coastal zone as a whole and that the review suggested above should extend to consideration of the whole coast.
11. Most of the recommendations in the report required the Project Steering Group to undertake a further body of work. This was not considered appropriate since most of the recommendations were aimed at improving the running of Estuary Management

Projects as set up under the EN Estuaries Initiative. The Steering Group did not have the mandate to undertake such work.

12. The report identified a series of core functions and assessment measures for EN style estuaries projects. These, the Steering Group concluded, were a useful starting point for guiding current and future projects.

Estuary Review Steering Group  
10 May 1999

# **TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE ESTUARY MANAGEMENT IN ENGLAND**

FINAL REPORT

March 1999

Part 1 - Results & Recommendations

# **TOWARDS SUSTAINBLE ESTUARY MANAGEMENT RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT**

## **Executive summary**

The objectives of the study are:

- To review and demonstrate the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the current arrangements for ensuring the sustainable use of England's estuaries.
- To make clear recommendations on the way forward for estuary management in England, including how to secure the necessary ownership, commitment and funding.

This report presents the key findings of the study.

A Steering Group that is drawn from a cross section of interests has guided the study. Data was gathered from organisations and individuals that are engaged in the use and management of England's estuaries, via desk study, telephone interview and consultation meetings and workshops. The study was carried out between November 1998 and February 1999. An Evidence of Analysis Report and a set of supporting papers accompany this report.

To provide a sensible structure for this review, a series of core functions for estuary management are suggested (section 5). These provide a reference point for assessing the degree to which estuary management accords with the underlying principle of sustainable development. In addition, a series of key outputs are presented (section 6). These have been put forward in order to help provide a baseline against which the information collated on estuary management during this study can be examined.

Data collated during this study has been grouped according to key outputs. By comparing the outputs of estuary management with the core functions an assessment has been made of whether or not progress is being made towards sustainable development. In addition a section on funding is included where the main inputs to estuary management are calculated (section 7.6).

The report is structured into sections that present the results (section 7), and later a discussion (section 8), on each of the following key outputs / inputs:

- Awareness raising.
- Conflict prevention.
- Influencing and co-ordinating the plans of others.
- Estuary management partnerships.
- Funding estuary management.

A section is also included on wildlife and environmental gain.

An overall assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of estuary management in England is provided, together with a set of 29 conclusions and a statement on value for money (section 9).

Finally, the suggested ways forward (section 10) contains the key tasks necessary to progress and improve estuary management in England. Many of these focus on the need to improve accountability, monitoring, evaluation and focus. Some principles for communicating the suggested ways forward are also included.



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## Structure of the report

This Report is written in three sections:

**Section I – Background to the Study**, includes the purpose and objectives of this study and a summary of the history and current status of estuary management in England.

**Section II – Objective Review**, is a summary of the findings of the study using data gathered via desk studies, telephone interviews and consultations with stakeholders.

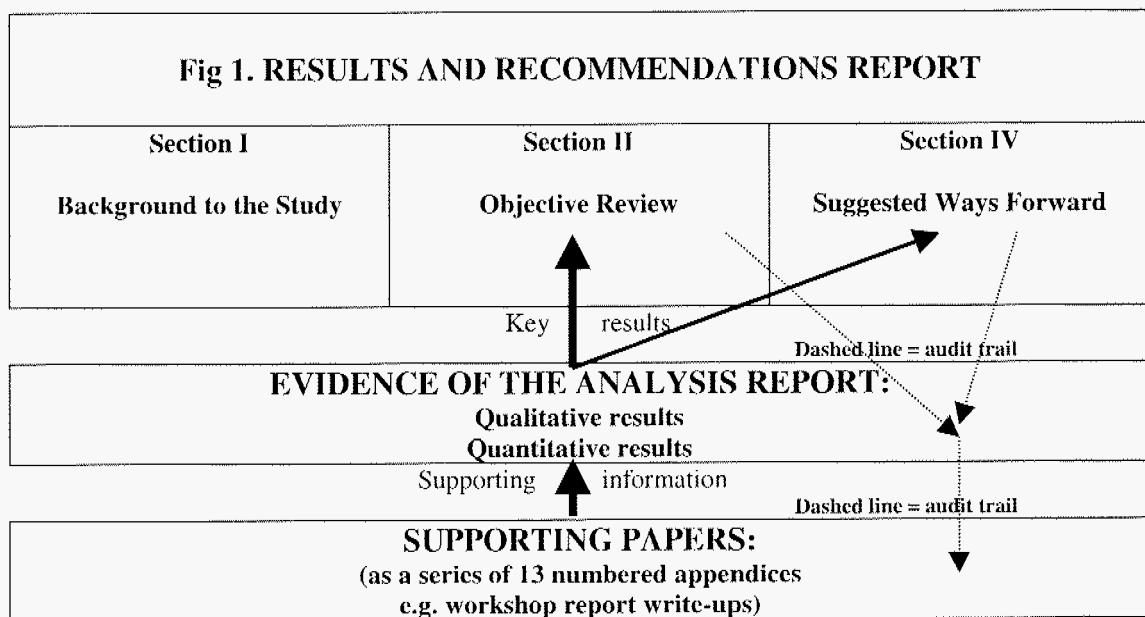
**Section III – Suggested Ways Forward**, this section is an assessment of what needs to be done to take sustainable estuary management forward in England. It is based on the findings of the objective review, with a particular focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system.

## Supporting documents

This Results and Recommendations Report is supported by two other documents:

- **The Evidence of Analysis Report** presents the detailed methodology, rationale behind the analysis and the results of analysis. Much of the information is presented as graphs and tabulated data.
- **A Supporting Papers file** that contains all the relevant data gathered as part of this study as a series of 14 numbered appendices.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between this Report and its supporting documents.



## **Definitions**

**Estuary management** is a generic term representing a spectrum of planning and management activity on estuaries. Three further definitions are needed to describe specific elements of estuary management:

- **Estuary management plan** refers to the planning document. This may be an estuary-specific plan, strategy or action plan that has been prepared by a partnership of organisations.
- **Estuary management partnership** refers to the organisations and bodies involved in preparing and / or implementing an estuary management plan.
- **Estuary management process** refers to the process of estuary management. This is a broader term that embraces the plan, the partnership, the framework and the decision making process on estuaries set-up and informed by English Nature's Estuaries Initiative.

**Steering Group** are the organisations that are overseeing this study. They are listed in section 1.3 and include the client.

**Management group** is a generic term for the grouping of organisations that oversee the estuary management process and are largely responsible for setting the work programme.

**Stakeholders** are any organisation, body or party with an interest and / or role in the management and use of estuaries.

# 1 SECTION I – BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- **To review and demonstrate the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the current arrangements for ensuring the sustainable use of England's estuaries.**
- **To make clear recommendations on the way forward for estuary management in England, including how to secure the necessary ownership, commitment and funding.**

## 1.2 Principles behind the study

The following principles underpin this study:

### **Principle 1**

The underlying goal is the long-term sustainable development of England's estuaries.

### **Principle 2**

A degree of co-ordination on estuaries is needed but there is no assumption or pre-conceived view that the existing approach of estuary management plans supported by Estuary Project Officers should continue.

### **Principle 3**

This study must not be conducted in a vacuum because estuary management needs to be linked to the plans of others' e.g. Local Environment Agency Plans and coastal zone management plans.

## 1.3 Role of the client and Steering Group

English Nature, the Environment Agency and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) have funded this study. A Steering Group has been set-up to guide the work. Its membership is drawn from a cross section of interests to ensure objectivity, and to help build confidence in the recommendations.

The Steering Group comprises:

- Association of Local Authorities
- Association of Sea Fisheries Committees
- British Ports Association
- Environment Agency
- English Nature
- RSPB
- The U.K. Major Ports Group
- The Wildlife Trusts
- World Wide Fund for Nature

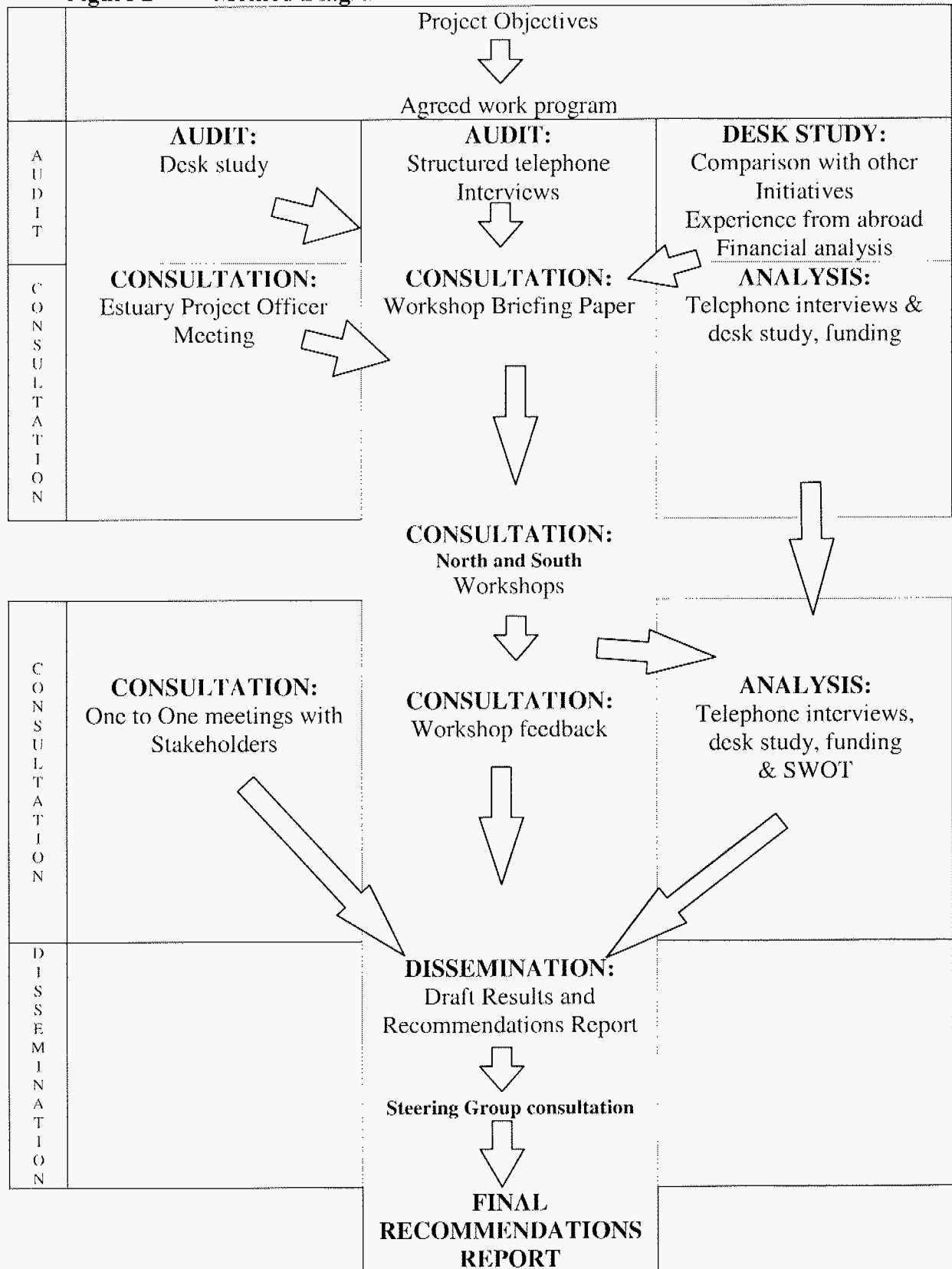
## 1.4 The approach

The method was built around the following key activities:

- Desk study of influential reports.
- Structured telephone interview.
- Consultation with key stakeholders via meetings and workshops.

Figure 2 summarises the methodology used. A full method statement is contained within Appendix 2 of the supporting papers.

**Figure 2 Method Diagram.**



## 2 Context to the study

### 2.1 Background to estuary management

Britain has the most extensive estuarine resource of any country in Europe. Its estuaries are of fundamental importance to the economy and subject to a wide range of uses including, commercial navigation, commercial fisheries, recreation and effluent disposal. Many of England's estuaries are nationally or internationally important for wildlife.

Estuarine habitats are sensitive to human use and pressures. Some of these pressures result in adverse impacts on natural estuarine resources, and other estuary users. Estuary management plans seek to achieve a balance between the competing demands placed on estuaries through the principle of sustainable use.

### 2.2 Background to the Estuaries Initiative

The concept of coastal zone management is relatively new in the U.K. A small number of initiatives predate the English Nature Estuaries Initiative, including the Sefton Coast Management Scheme (started in 1978), and at Chichester Harbour Conservancy (where an estuary management plan was first produced in 1983).

English Nature's Estuaries Initiative originates from an observation by its predecessor body, the Nature Conservancy Council, that the value it placed on estuaries was not matched by the views of the public. The Nature Conservancy Council was also concerned about on-going degradation of estuaries in England. This resulted in the production of the *Estuaries Review* by Davidson *et al* (1991), which used Davidson's report as a platform to encourage Government to adopt a new approach to estuary management based on sustainable use.

It was not until 1992 that the concepts of coastal zone management reached mainstream thinking via the publication of the *House of Commons Select Committee Report on Coastal Zone Protection and Planning*; the Government's response to the Select Committee report (DoE, 1993) and the subsequent publication of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 20 on Coastal Planning* by the Department of the Environment (DoE, 1992).

English Nature launched their *Campaign for a Living Coast* in 1992, with the Estuaries Initiative forming part of the campaign. The aim of the Estuaries Initiative was to raise awareness of estuaries and adopt an integrated approach to estuarine management, thus shifting the balance from un-coordinated development towards sustainability.

The Estuaries Initiative promoted the establishment of estuary partnerships, the development of estuary management plans and the creation of Estuary Project Officer posts to co-ordinate the process and prepare a plan.

### 2.3 The wider context – coastal zone management in England

Since 1992 a whole series of initiatives and plans have developed on estuaries, the open coast and river catchments. Although a number of Government publications have sought to clarify the relationship between plans and cite examples of good *practice* (e.g. *Good Practice Guide*, NCEAG, 1993 and *DOE Policy Guidelines for the Coast*, 1995),

considerable potential remains for duplication and confusion of planning and management in the coastal zone.

Although it is beyond the scope of this review to consider the effectiveness of wider coastal zone management, other initiatives and legislative change such as the Habitats Directive do undoubtedly have a bearing on estuary management. Neither this study, nor its recommendations, should be considered in isolation from this wider context. Table 1 provides a summary of the on-going initiatives in the coastal zone and identifies those that have been considered within this review.

**Table 1 Key plans and initiatives with an influence on estuary management.**

<b>Management Plan / Initiative</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Treatment in the study</b>
AONB	Variable	Considered in analysis
Aquatic Management Plan	Estuary or open coast	Considered in analysis
Biodiversity Action Plans	County	Considered in analysis
County Structure Plans	County	Specific analysis
Estuary Shoreline Management Plan	Estuary	Specific analysis
European Union structural funding programs	Borough to transnational partnership	Wider context
Food and Environmental Protection Act license	Site specific	Wider context
Harbour Authority Management Plans	Harbour area	Specific analysis
Heritage Coast	Open coast – inter-county	Considered in analysis
Local Agenda 21	County	Wider context
Local Authority Coastal Management Plan	County	Specific analysis
Local Authority Service Plan	Borough or District	Considered in analysis
Local Environment Agency Plan	River Catchment	Specific analysis
Local Plan	Borough or District	Specific analysis
Natural Area Profiles	Sub-regional	Wider context
Recreation Management Plans	Local – Borough, county or estuary	Considered in analysis
Regional Planning Guidance	Regional	Considered in analysis
Shoreline Management Plan	Coastal cell – sub regional	Specific analysis
Special Area of Conservation	Estuary	Specific analysis
Special Protection Area	Estuary	Specific analysis
Voluntary Marine Areas and Voluntary Marine Nature Reserves	Open coast	Wider context

**Note:** The shaded text are the initiatives / plans that form the main focus of the analysis, those in italics were considered in the analysis but did not form core data.

## 2.4 The current system of estuary management in England

Whilst there is some variation in approach and organisational structure to suit local needs, the majority of estuary management processes work to similar principles and generally share the following features:

- A management group is responsible for driving the process of preparing the estuary management plan and overseeing its implementation.
- Working groups or topic groups carry out specific tasks under the control of the management group. These groups are used for a variety of purposes including report writing and policy development.
- An estuary forum is established as a mechanism for engaging wider interest.
- An individual or team is specifically charged with estuary management plan preparation. This includes Estuary Project Officers and contractors / consultants.

Some estuary management processes have been running for several years and are into the implementation process, whilst other's are only just establishing partnerships. All are voluntary schemes, with the exception of Chichester Harbour.

### **3 Limitations of this study**

The objective of this study is to complete an objective review of estuary management in England focusing in particular on estuary processes that have been established under English Nature's Estuaries Initiative. The methodology adopted by the consultants team represents the best opportunity for data capture and consultation within the resource constraints of the study.

Many of the outputs and benefits of estuary management, such as improved awareness and better communication, are process related and very difficult to quantify. This study therefore focuses on output evaluation rather than outcome evaluation. As there is no existing system for evaluating or comparing estuary management at the present time, direct comparison between estuaries has not been made.

In the main, quantitative data has been supported by a qualitative assessment of the responses to telephone interview and feedback from the Workshops. Where quantitative data is lacking this has been identified and qualitative data presented as a series of examples.

It is important to note that some of the data sets collected during this study are limited. This due to:

1. The fact that as work on this study progressed, the complexity of the task became more apparent.
2. The lack of national co-ordination / monitoring of estuary management from its inception to the present day.
3. There is an absence of performance appraisal systems for estuary management processes.