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SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS FOR COASTAL FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT IN THE UK

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Rising global mean sea levels and more frequent flood events are increasing the risk of coastal hazards such as flooding and erosion. Coastal communities are already experiencing the devastating impacts of storms and accelerated coastal erosion. The National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategies for England and Wales as well as the Coastal Change Adaptation Plans for Scotland incorporate nature-based solutions and natural flood management. However, while such solutions are recognised on a broad level, the implementation on a local level is still relatively slow.

This study assessed what influences social acceptance of nature-based solutions for coastal flood risk management on a general (socio-political acceptance) and a local scale (community acceptance). We conducted postal surveys and focus groups in four sites across the UK – Hesketh Bank (England), Pensarn (Wales), Airth (Scotland) and St Andrews (Scotland) to explore what influences community acceptance of nature-based solutions. To study the socio-political acceptance, we employed the Q methodology and interviewed a range of stakeholders, including risk managers, consultants and homeowners.

Nature-based solutions were accepted as efficient coastal flood risk management strategies on a broad socio-political level without focusing on specific sites. However, our findings indicate that local-level social acceptance depends on the sites, the current physical environment and existing schemes. The individual demographic characteristics such as age, education and income in our study did not impact the acceptance of nature-based solutions. Focus group participants also highlighted the funding challenges which often work in favour of hard-engineered solutions. To increase the social acceptance of nature-based solutions, it is essential to improve the knowledge about these solutions and provide evidence of their effectiveness.