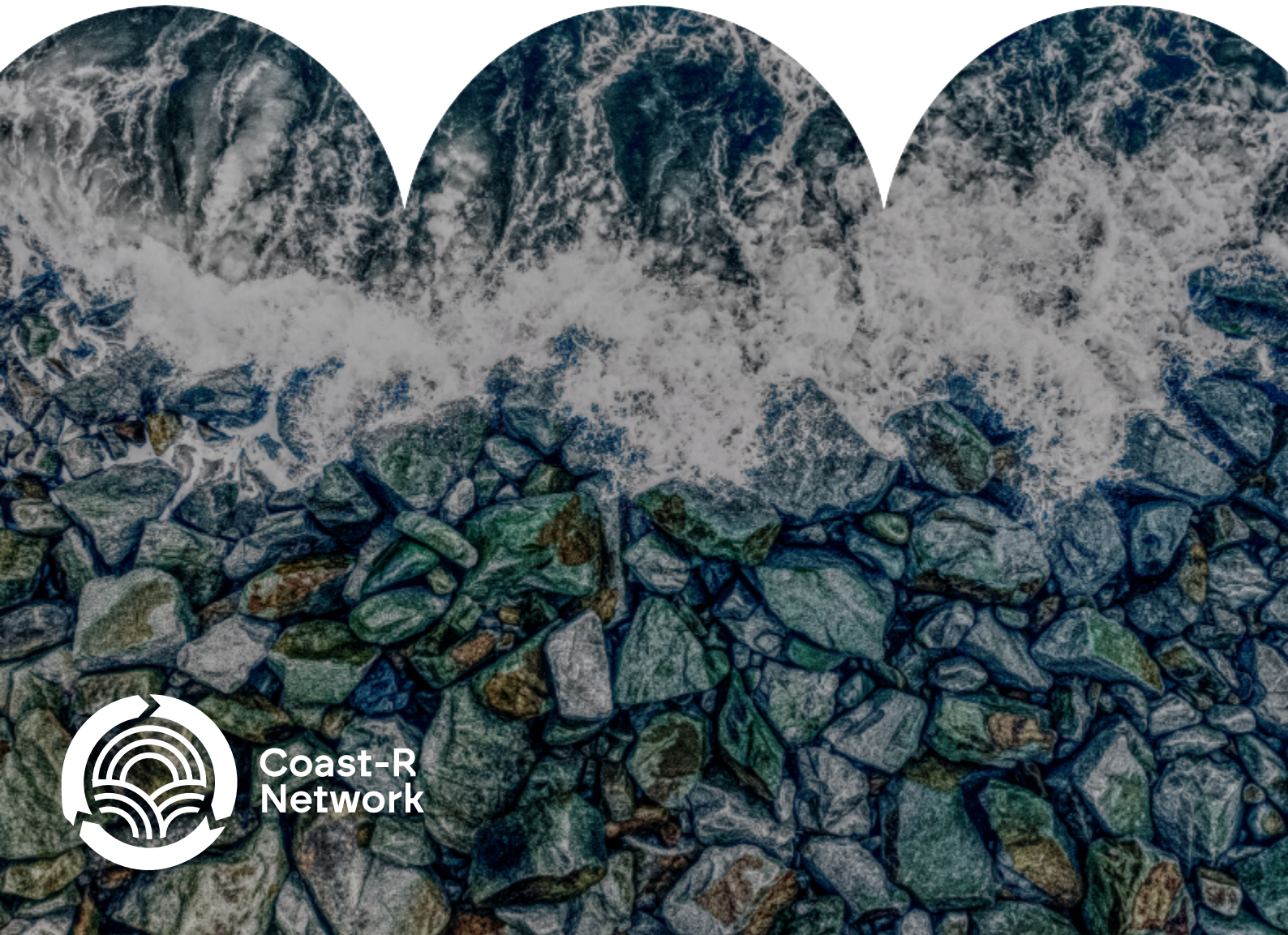


Coast-R Network

Year One Interim Monitoring Report

Kate Smith



Coast-R
Network



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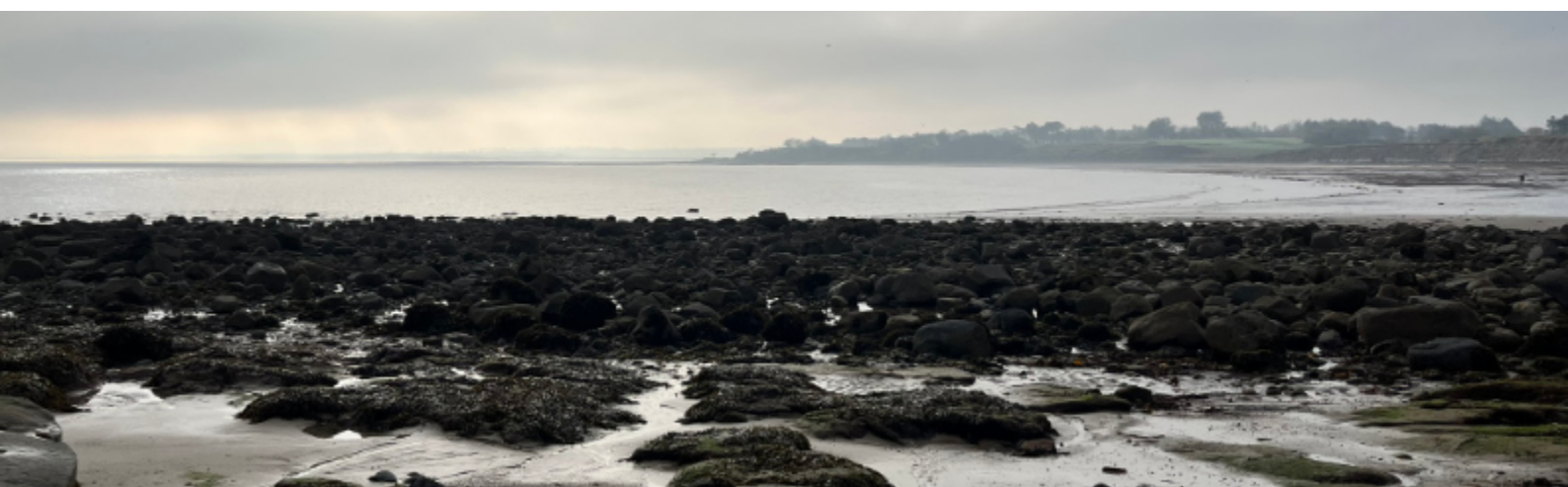
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SUMMARY

Since the announcement of the Coast-R network in Spring 2024 the challenge of tackling coastal change and loss in the face of worsening climate hazards has only become more urgent. With renewed sea-level risk data announced by the Environment Agency in 2025, and with UKRI, Westminster, devolved and local governments increasingly focussed on the intersectional environment, social, economic and political challenge of coastal resilience, the launch of the Coast-R network happened at a crucial time for UK resilience, mitigation and adaptation. The intensity of activity across government, the third sector and industry around coastal resilience enabled us to offer the Network as a forum for collective learning and collaboration.

Highlights of our first year include invitations for key Network colleagues to participate in government evidence sessions, and opportunities to engage with nationwide practitioners at Flood and Coast 2025.

Meanwhile, the number of people in our network has grown to more than 400. We have successfully launched a series of webinars. We have come together to learn at a fabulous Dialogues Training event in Aberystwyth, networked at conferences up and down the UK, and nurtured positive relationships with the ReCCS projects as they start their work.

This report on the first year of the Coast-R Network's activities contains an overview of the project, our methodology for monitoring and evaluating the work we do, and an account of our first year's activities. Having handed over to the University of Glasgow for the second year of Coast-R we look forward to more exciting ways of working together as an interdisciplinary community committed to co-creating positive futures for resilient coasts.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Background

The Coast-R Network is an inclusive and collaborative community of practice working to build knowledge, action and resilience for UK coastal communities and seas. We are a diverse team, including academics, UK marine, coastal and government agencies, industry partners, local authorities, the voluntary sector and communities most affected by coastal change. Together, we are working to better understand coastal change and enhance the resilient management of UK coastal communities and seas, and the natural capital that sustains them.

These ambitious objectives will be delivered across 6 work packages and a Flexible Fund. Hosted at the University of Hull and co-led by academics at Glasgow, Liverpool, Southampton and Aberystwyth we aim to deliver its objectives across the UK, augmenting the work of the Resilient Coastal Communities and Seas (ReCCS) programme's four research projects. We work with them and our own network members to deliver against the ReCCS programme objectives.

Objectives

- To build a new transdisciplinary, cross-sector and inclusive community of practice
- To enhance capacity and capability to deliver a step-change in research, innovation and practice on place-based and whole-systems approaches for better understanding coastal change
- To embed EDI and accessibility throughout our work to ensure our impacts are equitable and deliver social justice
- To enhance the resilient management of UK coastal seas and communities and the natural capital that sustains them

METHODOLOGY

We have developed a transformative realist evaluation methodology to evaluate Coast-R's activities, using mixed methods for data generation and analysis.

This enables us:

to understand what has worked, for whom and why in our programme delivery;

to understand our impacts (both intended and unintended)

to generate evidence of impact and learning for all involved in the project

Initially we mapped our objectives and activities into a Context, Mechanism, Outcome configuration (CMOC), with indicative data generation methods. This configuration establishes clear pathways towards achieving the changes we hope to see as a result of Coast-R's work, but does not capture all of the complexities of a project as ambitious and multi-faceted as this.

We therefore developed supplementary programme theory statements to help us understand better the work we hope to do and the changes it will lead to.





Context (C)	Mechanism (M)	Outcome (O)	Data generation method
Diverse stakeholders engaged through multiple methods	Increased place-based understanding and mutual learning		Surveys, interviews, participatory/reflective workshops
Ongoing partnerships via practitioner and community engagement activities	Formation of a transdisciplinary, cross-sector, inclusive community of practice	Better understanding of coastal change	Tracking size and scale of network; quant monitoring of partnership and community activities and outputs
Flexible fund grants supporting ReCCS-themed research	Generation of scalable tools and evidence to support decision-making	Step-change in place-based, whole systems approaches to coastal change research and practice	Surveys, quant monitoring and reporting of FF projects; size and scale of FF applicants and awardees; monitoring of outputs
Embedded EDI practices, monitoring diversity and evaluating inclusivity	Enhanced representation, equity and social justice impacts	Enhanced resilient management of UK Coastal Seas and communities	Surveys, interviews, tracking size and scale and demographic characteristics of event attendance and output reach



PROGRAMME THEORY STATEMENTS

1. If we build effective, diverse networks of stakeholders, using multiple methods of engagement, we will enhance the resilient management of UK coastal seas and communities and the natural capital that sustains them, because there will be increased placebased understanding of the challenges facing UK coastal communities and seas.

2. If we build partnerships with stakeholders, through ongoing and accessible practitioner and community workshops, conferences, online seminars and other events then we will enhance resilience to intersectional stressors because we will have built a new transdisciplinary cross-sector and inclusive community of practice.

3. If we use the flexible fund grants to support new research on the ReCCS themes we will improve capacity and capability to deliver a step-change in research, innovation and practice on

place-based and whole systems approaches for better understanding coastal change, because we will have generated enhanced, scalable tools and evidence for informed decision and policy making, and have improved partnership work between stakeholders and coastal places.

4. If we embed EDI and accessibility throughout our work by monitoring the diversity of our participants, and evaluating the inclusivity of our events we will create a stronger, more representative community of practice within Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM), and the UK's capacity for future coastal research will be improved because it will be more equitable, representative and able deliver social justice impacts

YEAR 1 ACTIVITIES

During 2024-25, the Coast-R Network team led more than 1,400 distinct engagements (mailing list sign-ups, attendance at annual forum, training sessions, meetings, webinars and workshops) with people from across the UK.

As part of our work, we:

- undertook a rapid review of relevant literature, reports and policies on coastal change;
- iterated and refined key definitions and programme scope;
- led the Coast-R Collaborative Coastal Enquiry across a series of five workshops in 2024 and 2025;
- worked with our community of practice to host events, meetings and training sessions with a broad range of coastal and marine stakeholders;
- and held participatory and creative workshops in communities experiencing rapid coastal change.



NETWORK GROWTH

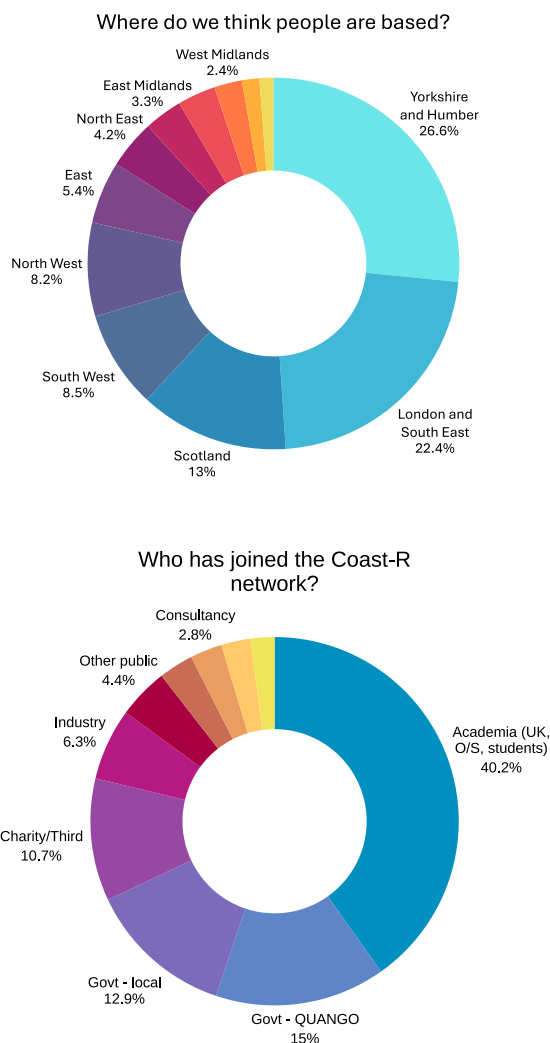
A network like Coast-R relies on the diversity and breadth of its membership. Setting up an accessible and simple joining mechanism was therefore an early priority for us and an important part of making sure we create an effective, diverse network of stakeholders. Whilst the timeline for announcing Coast-R was subject to external delays, we were able to start inviting people to join us at Flood and Coast 2024.

We wanted to make our onboarding process straightforward, so limited the information we ask people for to essential contact information, organisational, sector and reason for joining/interest. Because of the complexity in the locations of people working for regional, devolved and national governments we do not ask for people's location but are able to infer this from their organisational affiliation.

This shows that the two largest cluster of members are located in Yorkshire and the Humber - unsurprising given how many people joined following our launch event in Hull- and in London and the South East. Whilst the largest section of our membership is drawn from academia, arms length bodies/ QUANGOs and local government make up the next largest sections.

We expect the geographic distribution

of our membership to reflect increasing activity from our partner universities, and will work hard to increase the representation of all regions within the Network, in part by proactively seeking broad geographic representation within our Small Grant Fund awards.



Taking part in our Collaborative Inquiry, Coast-R launch event, Hull, November 2024



Creative methods for deep mapping, Coast-R launch event, Hull, November 2024

COAST-R NETWORK WORK

Work Package 1: Governance and management

Project team
induction

Project steering
group established

Strategic Advisory
Board established

Regular reports to
funder

Establishment of
selection panels for
flexible fund
allocation

Work Package 2: Networking and events

UoH launch

UoH one-day event

UoH online follow-
ups

Monthly webinars

UoG one-day event

UoG online follow-
ups

UoL one-day event

UoL online follow-ups

UoH one-day event 2

UoH end of project
event

Work Package 3: Training and secondments

Aberystwyth
dialogues training
workshop

Secondments

UoS Channel Coastal
Observatory event

UoG specialist
training event

UoH specialist
training

PACKAGE DELIVERY YR 1

**Work Package 4:
Research and policy
interventions**

Community workshop (asset and gap mapping) (Hornsea)

Practitioner workshops (asset and gap mapping) @ UoH one-day event, Flood and Coast

Co-design of training needs

Community workshops

Practitioner workshops

Flexible fund

**Work Package 5:
Policy and practice
outputs**

Practitioner workshops (iterating and feeding back) @ UoH one-day event, Flood and Coast

Co-developed training, toolkits and case studies

Community workshops (iterating and feeding back)

Foresight doc 1

Foresight doc 2

Solutions report 1

Solutions report 2

Solutions report 2

**Work Package 6:
Evaluation**

Theory of change

Development of evaluation framework

Interim annual reporting

Evaluation toolkit

Final project evaluation

WP1: GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Our Team of Co-Investigators at Hull has met fortnightly, alongside monthly online meetings of the wider Project Steering Group of Co-Investigators from our partner Universities of Glasgow, Liverpool, Southampton and Aberystwyth.

The Coast-R Strategic Advisory board has been established, chaired by Prof Suraje Dessai with representatives drawn from community and private sectors within our membership as well as early career researchers from the wider ReCCS programme. Plans are well underway for the development of an ECR network connecting the four different ReCCS projects.

We have also valued regular feedback sessions with the UKRI funding team, and are committed to our ongoing work with ReCCS project PIs to co-develop the subsequent years' activities we deliver, particularly around the specialist regional training workshops that each partner university will host.

We were delighted that Hull Co-I Dr Gill Hughes was able to attend the ESRC's regional engagement workshops in York.

Year one was book-ended by in-person meetings of the Project Steering Group in Manchester; in September 2024 the team mapped their aspirations for the network alongside skills and knowledge, and a year later gathered again to reflect on the network's first year of activity. These reflections included sharing the most important change experienced by Co-Is in the network's first year - some of these are shared on the page opposite.

The diversity of these changes reflects the breadth and depth of our disciplinary backgrounds as well as the range of activities we've undertaken over the year. We have improved our connections, knowledge and understanding, and ways of working in collaboration, even when that growth has challenged us to do things differently.



“ This involvement has significantly boosted my motivation and expanded my professional network. It’s encouraged me to think more creatively, learn from others, and gather ideas for future events, particularly as we plan for future events.

“ Membership of Coast-R has increased the size of the network I engage with, and more critically, my awareness of how other disciplines are engaging with the challenges and opportunities faced by coastline and coastal communities



Some of the Coast-R team at our Year 1 launch event, Hull, November 2024

“ I have a better - clearer and more detailed - understanding of the practical and more/less-tractable issues facing local and regional UK coasts and seas... I have a better sense of the complexity, entwinement, and urgency of risks at local, regional, and national scales within the UK.

“ At times it’s been uncomfortable, but in a good way - it’s made me reflect more on my own assumptions and pushed me to listen more carefully to others... It’s also reminded me how important it is to make space for these kinds of conversations, even when they’re a bit awkward.

WP2: NETWORKING AND EVENTS

On Tuesday 5th and Wednesday 6th November, we welcomed more than 140 people to Hull to launch the Coast-R network. We opened proceedings with a launch dinner at The Deep in Hull city centre, where invited attendees were welcomed by Prof David Petley, then Vice Chancellor of the University of Hull.

Over an extended networking lunch, participants got the chance to meet the teams leading the ReCCS Programme's large research projects, before an afternoon of interactive workshops showcasing some of the creative and participatory approaches we will be using throughout the Coast-R Network and ReCCS projects.

On Wednesday, the Coast-R Network was officially launched by Emma Hardy MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minster for Water and Flooding).

Participants generally shared positive experiences of the event, though we recognise the need to do more to strengthen diversity and inclusion in our in-person events.





The Coast-R team was joined by ReCCS project colleagues at Flood and Coast in June 2025, welcomed delegates to our stand to speak directly to them about the ReCCS programme and opportunities to engage with the network.

Dr Amy McCarron (TRANSECTS) project told us how “talking to representatives from other networks offered helpful insights into the different ways they support engagement and build community”.



In July 2025 Dr Charlotte Lyddon (Liverpool) represented the Coast-R Network at the UK Coastal Research Conference.

She connected with attendees throughout the event to share the motivations, aims, and upcoming plans of the Network. Many were already familiar with Coast-R, while others were eager to learn more about upcoming flexible funding opportunities for interdisciplinary research.



In May 2025 we launched our series of informative monthly webinars on different aspects of coastal resilience.

Each webinar brings a range of perspectives and experiences to a wide audience. Over 100 people from a wide range of sectors and backgrounds signed-up to the first two sessions with a number of participants also joining from the Coast-R Network membership.

WP3: TRAINING AND SECONDMENTS

With our commitment to improving capacity and capability across communities of place, practice and policy, Coast-R will deliver a range of workshops around the UK.

In March 2025, we held our first specialist regional training event. Twenty researchers from across the UK gathered in Aberystwyth for an intensive training in dialogue and engagement. Hosted by the Aberystwyth University Dialogue Centre's Dr Jennifer Wolowic the

workshop equipped participants with foundations for hosting meaningful conversations and running workshops as part of their work with the Coast-R Network.

Participants told us about the changes this workshop would make to their work, both in relation to the network and in other contexts.

We are excited that planning for 2026's regional training workshop, to be held in Southampton, is well underway.



Workshop delegates gather on Aberystwyth sea-front, March 2025

”
It's an impact to all my work not just this project, [hosting is] a way to do things differently. And a larger impact will make time for themselves to prepare and be ready to 'host'.

”
A significant change for me is the opportunity provided through Coast-R to reflect more deeply about how to engage and collaborate with community organisations and to learn more about dialogic approaches.

”
I'm reflecting on how I act as a facilitator, and how what I've learned over the last couple of days 'fits into' that, and what can be improved.

”
I have found it good learning how to 'unpick' difference forms of conversation. I also found the 'tools for getting unstuck' element very useful.



Participants getting "unstuck", Aberystwyth, March 2025



WP4: RESEARCH AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS

We have delivered a range of activities under this work package, mainly focussing on working with communities of place and practice to map assets and gaps around coastal resilience.

We also carried out pre-event survey work with our launch event registrants to explore their understanding of assets and gaps in current coastal resilience research and policy. The three participatory workshops held at our launch event reflect our commitment to

build partnerships with stakeholders as part of fostering new transdisciplinary, cross-sector and inclusive communities of practice

The results of this work have informed the development of outputs under the following work package; the process of generating this data has itself been a valuable process for building community and collective understanding.



Prof Larissa Naylor (Glasgow) is playing a key role in shaping the work of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' Governance Committee.

Appointed as a special advisor to the committee in the summer of 2025, she has already shared her expertise with them on the science of coastal erosion risks, and will be working on the development of a report on managing coastal erosion in a changing climate.

The report will be discussed in a Council of Europe Governance Committee meeting in 2026, and will eventually be shared with 130,000 local and regional governments across the 32 member countries.



Community workshops in coastal places including Hornsea, East Yorkshire, have helped us develop an appreciative understanding of what matters to people living in coastal places that are experiencing rapid changes. It also helped us develop and articulate insights that has informed the work done in coastal places by, for example, Changing Coasts East Riding - one of five DEFRA-funded Coastal Transition Accelerator projects around the English coast.

The three research-to-policy workshops held at the launch event invited participants to explore policy, language, and sense of coastal place using a range of participatory tools. Participants told us that these workshops were 'excellent', 'highly collaborative' and 'revealed a great deal about commonalities/differences in approach'



WP5: POLICY AND PRACTICE OUTPUTS

With so many activities for other work packages completed in our first year, we expected all the delivery of policy and practice outputs to take shape from our second year onwards. Indeed, the final steps towards completion of our Year One Policy Foresight document are being completed, and there will be additional policy outputs to report in our second year.

The Hull-based Coast-R team worked together to submit written evidence in January 2025 to the UK parliament's Environmental Audit Committee inquiry on Flood Resilience in England. Shortly after this was submitted we were delighted two of the Coast-R team were invited to give evidence at the first of five in-person evidence sessions as part of the committee's work on flood resilience. Supported by briefings prepared by the wider Coast-R team Profs Briony McDonagh (Hull) and Larissa Naylor (Glasgow) presented evidence drawing on their expertise from a broad range of flood risk and resilience research activities.

They drew on their experiences of building community flood resilience through the Risky Cities project, which utilised arts and humanities

approaches to build community engagement around flood resilience and climate, and challenged the committee to ensure that parliament takes the steps necessary for the bold transformative actions that will ensure that the whole society can experience a just adaptation to our changing climate.

Reflecting our first programme theory statement, these activities show that using multiple methods of engagement and building inclusive, accessible partnerships across and beyond our network, is already starting to have a positive effect on the resilient management of UK coastal seas and communities and the natural capital that sustains them.

We are immensely grateful to the support we have received from MPs both at our own events and at national events such as Flood and Coast, and look forward to the development of more policy and practice outputs as the network continues to grow.



Coast-R academics Profs Briony McDonagh and Larissa Naylor give evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee, January 2025



Prof Briony McDonagh talks to Minister for Water and Flooding, MP for Hull West and Hessle Emma Hardy at Flood and Coast, June 2025



Lee Pitcher, MP for Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme visits the Coast-R stand at Flood and Coast, June 2025

WP6: EVALUATION

The range of activities and events described in this report point to the success of our first year. We have worked hard to deliver activities across all our work packages and in line with each of our four programme theory statements.

The infographic on page 9 highlights the scale of the network's growth, with more detailed information on page 13 showing that we are reaching beyond academia and across the whole of the UK. Our current geographic reach is dominated by Yorkshire and the Humber - not surprising given the large number of members who signed up after our Year One launch event in Hull.

We expect this reach to extend in subsequent years of the network, and we also expect that our consistent and active presence at Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management sector events such as Flood and Coast will extend the breadth of our sectoral coverage to create a more balanced profile.

We recognise that we must improve inclusion and diversity within the network, and are actively working with organisations including the Coastal Special Interest group to map and audit the nodes within our network to understand how the lack of diversity, inclusion and equality is expressed throughout the coastal community of practice.



Feedback from participants at our in-person events has been largely positive, though we note the need highlighted by some of our launch event attendees to ensure that in-person events are well served by public transport, and that there is plenty of time both for networking and lunching.

Whilst we recognise the real value of in-person events, we also understand that online events are highly accessible. Each of our in-person annual events is coupled with online follow-up activities. Our regular webinars are also planned with accessibility in mind - the webinars held in Year One attracted an average of 90 attendees. We will continue to monitor attendance at these, as well as ensuring that presenters and guest speakers reflect our commitment to diversity and include communities and the private sector.

With the long-term sector-wide challenges to HEIs, prioritising staff time for network-related activities is ongoing. The initial uncertainty and delay in announcing the funding of Coast-R and starting to deliver network activities, and our objective to be community needs-led means that

devising and implementing shareable data generation methods has taken time. Equally, balancing the input across all the partner HEIs has required ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

We have successfully brokered effective and warm working relationships with national-level stakeholders. Building these new interpersonal relationships has been rewarding but has taken time and resource.

The opportunities afforded by establishing these relationships in Year One of the network will yield benefits across and beyond the remaining years of Coast-R's funded activity though, and have set up pathways for us to deliver an ambitious and challenging range and number of workshops and other engagement activities.

CONCLUSION

The first year of Coast-R has provided an important platform for building a shared understanding of coastal change, fostering relationships across sectors, and establishing the infrastructure needed for continued programme delivery.

Activities have been successfully undertaken across all six work packages, with evidence of strong coordination between partners and meaningful engagement with communities of place and practice. The network has grown substantially, supported by more than 26 engagement activities reaching around 1400 people, alongside active participation at national events, monthly webinars and targeted training workshops. Collectively, these early achievements demonstrate clear progress toward developing and sustaining an inclusive community of practice that spans research, government, industry, and civil society.

The programme's focus on collaboration is reflected not only in the range of events and outputs, but in the relationships developed during the year. National-level engagement, including invitations to provide

evidence to parliamentary committees, has helped position Coast-R as a trusted voice within wider policy conversations around climate resilience and coastal change.

Participants at the launch event and subsequent activities also reported positive experiences of knowledge sharing, highlighting the value of creative and dialogic methods introduced through workshops.

At the same time, reflections captured through evaluation activities point to learning that extends beyond the network itself—informing wider research practice, shaping engagement methods, and encouraging new approaches to collaboration within participating institutions.

As the network moves into Year Two, there is a clearly defined platform from which to deepen impact.

Work is already progressing toward expanding policy-relevant outputs, strengthening regional training provision, enhancing visibility, and improving diversity and inclusion across events and membership. The commitment to ongoing monitoring

and evaluation will further support evidence-based decision-making, helping to refine delivery and maintain alignment with programme-level priorities.

Continued engagement with the ReCCS programme projects, national and devolved governments, local authorities, community organisations and sector partners will be integral to ensuring that the learning generated becomes embedded and actionable



Participants at the Hull launch event, November 2024

