

Introducing the new approach to flood risk management

Important changes are taking place to the way floods are managed in Scotland. These changes will improve our understanding of flooding, its causes and impacts and help us to plan better protection for our communities, businesses and the environment.



There are many areas in Scotland at risk from flooding. Flooding is predominantly a natural event that becomes a problem when it has an impact on people. Flooding can't be prevented entirely, and all rivers, large or small, will flood from time to time. However, it is possible to have some influence on flooding and reduce the damage it causes. In order to do that, we need to improve our understanding of the causes and impacts of flooding so that we can plan and co-ordinate our actions. The changes being introduced will allow us to do just that.

Why do we need this new approach?

Our approach to flood risk management in the past has largely been based on flood defence and flood warning. With climate change, and predictions of more intense rainfall and stormier weather in summer months, wetter winters and rising sea levels, we are likely to experience damaging floods more frequently. We need modern approaches and well co-ordinated, sustainable actions to deal with increased flood risk.

How is flood management changing?

The biggest change to flood management is the emphasis on managing flood risk 'sustainably'. This means considering all sources of floodwaters affecting an area, whether from rivers, groundwaters, coastal areas and where extreme weather events overwhelm the drainage and wastewater networks in our towns and cities. It means looking at where

such floods arise and taking pro-active actions to reduce the impact on those communities most at risk of flooding without moving the problem elsewhere. This concept is illustrated in Figure 1.

Another important change is the introduction of flood risk management plans. These plans will consider all forms of flood risk from rivers, groundwater and coastal areas, as well as floods caused by overwhelmed drainage systems in our towns and cities. Plans will look both at flood risk issues being experienced now and those that we are likely to experience in future, helping us target investment in those areas most at risk.

The plans will be produced jointly by a number of organisations, alongside local communities who will also play an important role.

When will the new approach be delivered?

This big change will not happen overnight. We need to improve our understanding of flood risk and its impacts before we can develop better actions to manage flood events. This means that there are a number of steps that need to be taken before publishing flood risk management plans in 2015.

The planning cycle does not end here – instead, the plans will set out a road map for addressing current and future flood risk in Scotland in the long-term (up to 50 years). Furthermore, plans and actions they contain will be reviewed and updated every six years.

Managing flooding sustainably means considering all sources of floodwaters and taking pro-active actions to reduce the impact of flooding on communities.

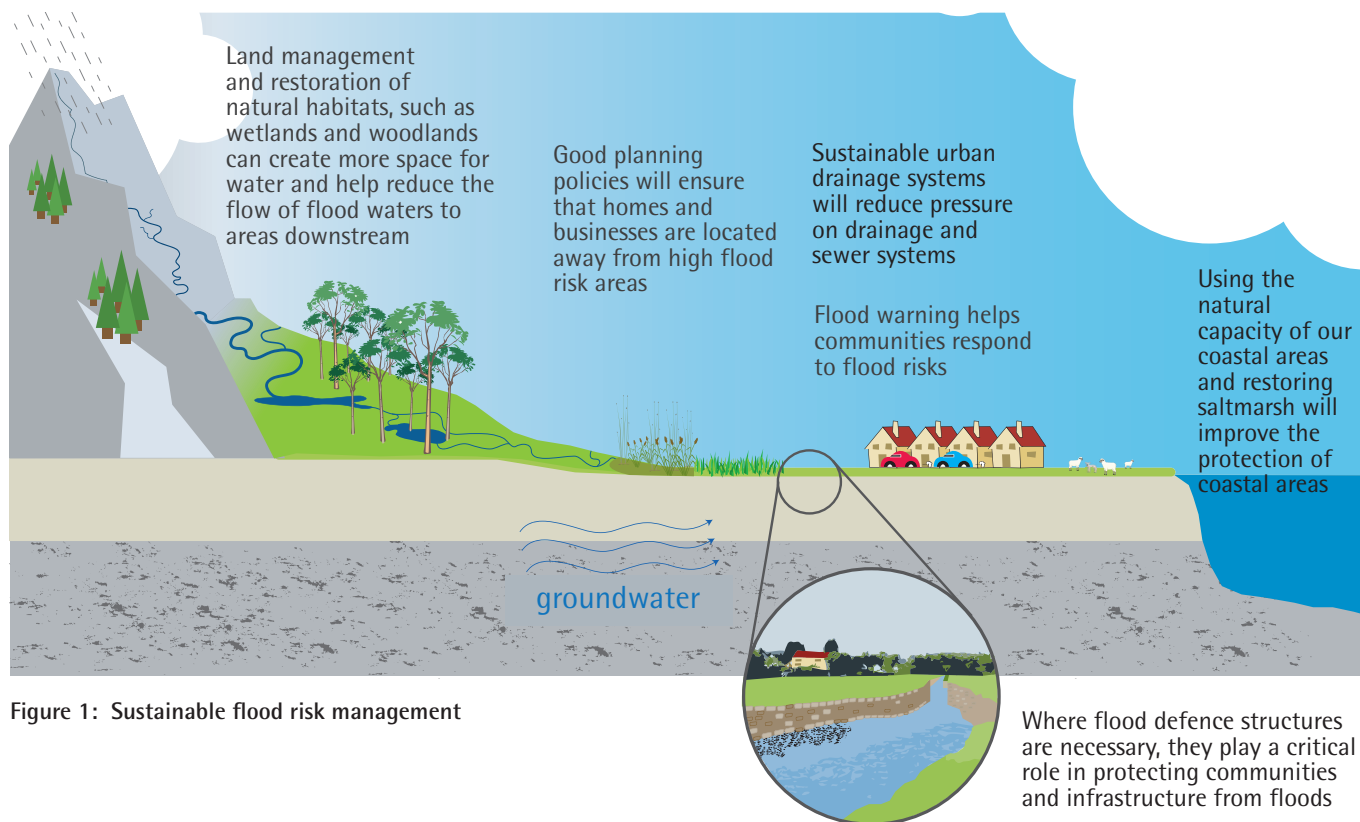


Figure 1: Sustainable flood risk management

Key steps to producing flood risk management plans

1. Identifying areas most vulnerable to flooding

The first step to producing flood risk management plans is identifying those areas in Scotland most vulnerable to flooding. This information will be developed using the latest data and modelling techniques to provide a broad but accurate picture of flooding issues across Scotland. This information will be made publicly available from December 2011.

2. Identifying where flood waters go and the damage they cause

The second step is identifying where flood waters could go and the damage they could cause under different flooding scenarios. This includes analysing the number of people who will be affected, the implications for economic activity, and the damage caused to the environment. This information will be publicly available from December 2013.

3. Producing flood risk management plans

The final stage is producing flood risk management plans. SEPA will produce a national flood management plan for Scotland, which will be complemented by local flood management plans produced by local authorities. These plans will identify and co-ordinate actions to tackle flooding, and will ultimately ensure that investment is targeted at those areas at greatest risk. Everyone will get a chance to input into these plans, which will be released for public comment in 2014.

Who is responsible?

We are all responsible for protecting ourselves and our property from flooding. This means taking action to ensure we do all we can to help minimise flood damage to our land or property. Public bodies will do what they can to reduce the overall impacts of floods and ensure that, where possible, the risks are minimised.

Responsibilities for implementing the new approach to flood risk management are shared:

Public and communities – engaging with the process, sharing the local knowledge and taking action

The public and local communities will be given every opportunity to be actively engaged in the process of producing and implementing flood risk management plans. The public has an important role in sharing local knowledge and engaging in flood protection actions for their areas.

Local authorities – ensuring local accountability

Local authorities will continue to play a central role in managing flood risk in your local area and will lead on the preparation of local flood risk management plans. These plans will supplement the national plans prepared by SEPA and will ensure that objectives and actions are locally targeted and delivered.

Scottish Water – a key role in flood risk management
Scottish Water will be responsible for assessing the risk of flooding from surface water and combined (surface water and foul) sewers that results from higher than usual rainfall events. Once risks are identified, Scottish Water, working with local authorities and SEPA, will look for opportunities to reduce those risks through its capital investment programme. This will be co-ordinated with other work to address surface water flooding.

SEPA – a strategic role in flood risk management

SEPA has been given significant new responsibilities. Central to SEPA's new role is the delivery of information and co-ordination of flood risk management in Scotland. Key to the success of this work will be the development of a close and productive working relationship with local authorities, Scottish Water and other public bodies, alongside stakeholders and the public. SEPA will continue to provide flood forecasting and warning services, and these are being improved constantly.

Scottish Government – guiding the implementation process
Scottish Ministers are responsible for setting the policy framework for implementing this new approach to flooding, and will ultimately be responsible for approving the objectives and actions set out in flood risk management plans.

What are the benefits of this new approach?

This new approach to flood management will result in safer, stronger communities in Scotland. It will provide:

- a stronger voice for public and communities to influence actions to manage flooding;
- better information about where flood risk exists;
- clear lines of responsibility for implementing actions to manage flood risk;
- co-ordinated activities to manage flood risk;
- benefits for Scotland's communities, the economy, the environment and our cultural heritage.

Flooding will be managed in a way that improves the environment, providing opportunities to restore rivers and coastlines and creating green spaces for everyone to enjoy.



How can you participate?

It is important that, where possible, everyone takes the opportunity to become involved in flood management. The first opportunity will be when information about areas that are most vulnerable to flooding are published for public review in 2011. Following this, stakeholder groups will be set up in your local area in 2012, providing an opportunity for you to contribute to the production of flood risk management plans. Draft flood risk management plans will then be released for public review in 2014.

We will keep you informed of progress through easily accessible channels, and provide simple ways for you to contribute. It's up to you to participate as much or as little as you feel able.

Where you can find out more

You will find further information on the following websites:

SEPA: www.sepa.org.uk/flooding.aspx

Scottish Government: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Water/Flooding

Scottish Flood Forum: www.scottishfloodforum.org/

Scottish Water: www.scottishwater.co.uk

We understand that not everyone has internet access, so we will continue to keep local media and local organisations (like Community Councils) informed. Any newsletters or leaflets we publish online will also be made available free of charge via other means if you contact us via Floodline 0845 988 1188