

## **Ireland: Coastal protection work funded**

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JOHN Browne, Ireland's Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, today announced that he has allocated more than €3 million for "important" coastal protection works around the country in 2008.

“Ireland must continue to protect our coastline, sections of which are constantly under threat from erosion. Being an island community, our coastline is one of our most important natural resources and is of particular importance to our tourism industry. The coastal protection programme aims to construct works that slow or even halt erosion in places where the coastline is at its most vulnerable,” he said.

“The programme provides funding to a number of projects which are being managed by my Department’s Engineering Division. The most significant of these is the Coastal Protection Strategy Study which will continue into phases 2 and 3 in 2008. On completion, this study will determine future priorities in the area and how best to allocate our resources to ensure the preservation of our coastline and achieve the best value for money for taxpayers.” Other existing projects receiving funding include Geographic Information System (GIS) maintenance and development; tide gauges and wave buoys.

Minister Browne announced that funding of €900,000 has been already been allocated under the 2008 programme to emergency works at Inch beach, Co. Kerry. Other projects in Local Authority areas receiving funding include Ross in Co. Clare, Strandhill in Co. Sligo, Abbeyside, Dungarvan, in Co. Waterford, Clonakilty, Co. Cork and Casson Sound, Co. Donegal. In addition, coastal protection works will continue at St. Helens Bay and Curraclloe in Co. Wexford.

**Which Government Department made this announcement?**

**Do you think that this level of funding is adequate?**

**List three places where funding is being put in place?**

## **The Heritage Council**

...warned that unique maritime heritage features such as sand dune systems, salt marshes, Martello towers and fishing villages are under threat from poor planning decisions. It calls for a national backed framework to support local coastal management initiatives that includes coastal landscapes, biodiversity, off-shore development and provides clear guidance for new development that includes position of new housing, density and design.

The Heritage Council outlined the need for an integrated strategy that would promote the sustainable development of coastal areas and would place heritage at the centre. It warned of the negative effect of poorly sited tourism developments such as in Clare, Donegal, Waterford and Wexford and calls for integrated Coastal Zone Management that would manage the coast on a geographic rather than administrative basis.

**What is the Heritage Council calling for with regard to coastal management?**

**What do you think the Heritage Council means by referring to “poorly sited tourism developments”?**

## **The Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources**

... is responsible for prioritising and funding of Coastal Protection in Ireland. The complete study covers assistance to the Department for carrying out a major strategic review of coastal protection requirements in Ireland, examination of policy options regarding coastal protection generally and set out a basis for effective decision making in regard to resource allocation.

The present Phase 1 of the study covers the following activities:

Review of Coastal Protection policy and procedures in Ireland and Overseas, and development of options for future coastal protection policy and procedures in Ireland and development of specifications for the following phases of the project

**Why is a Review of Coastal Protection policy in Ireland and elsewhere necessary from time to time?**

## Sand Dune Management

From a nature conservation point of view sand dunes, along with salt-marshes, are often considered to be relatively natural habitats with a high nature conservation value. This is usually assessed by reference to the vegetation. The dynamic nature of the dunes creates a landscape with a highly variable topography, which provides suitable habitats for a wide variety of specialists of both, plants and animals.

Consequently, coastal landscapes should be maintained in a dynamic, migrating state, based on the significance of these features for ecological productivity, diversity of habitat and preservation of rare species

Even in their early stages of development dunes host highly specialised habitats and quite a number of rare and declining species are restricted to them.

However, dunes have been subject to considerable human impacts. These impacts have at a wide scale modified the nature of the vegetation, changed the geomorphological characteristics and even reduced massively the area of dune landscapes. Now a days, the value of coastal dunes is increasingly recognised and many efforts are made with respect to conservation management.

Why are sand dunes important in our coastal landscape?

What do you think are the problems caused by humans for our sand-dunes?

The high nature conservation value of sand dunes is determined the geomorphological variety, the variety in habitats and plant communities and the rich flora and fauna which rely on them for part or all of their life-cycle. The area is very dynamic and varied due to various gradients, e.g. from salt to fresh water, waterlogged to arid ecosystems, alkaline to acid soils and pioneer to climax vegetation, mostly developed in very small scale patterns.

Vegetation succession in dunes as a sequence from open mobile dunes to more stabilised types begins with the establishment of *Ammophila arenaria* and *Elymus arenarius*. The plants act as sand trapping systems which results in the development of foredunes. Dune grassland can establish as a more stable form where *Ammophila arenaria* becomes less frequent. This stage is followed by dune heath and scrubs, and as the oldest stage, dune woodland. Especially in very dynamic circumstances pioneer conditions with their pioneer communities can develop regularly. Fauna and flora are closely adapted to these extreme conditions and consequently a high biodiversity is found associated with rare species which often occur only in this habitat. Many rare and protected plant species also occur in nutrient-poor, moist to wet slacks, where the soil pH is buffered around neutral. Dune slacks can occur where the water table is near the surface of the sand

Apart from the habitats provided by sand dunes for plants and animals what is the other principal and very important purpose of sand dunes in protecting or coastlines?