

# £1bn flood-risk projects ‘poor use of public cash’

[Marc Horne](#)

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The £1 billion being spent on flood prevention schemes across Scotland is a poor use of public money, the founding chief executive of the Scottish government’s nature agency has claimed.

Dozens of projects aimed at protecting communities from flash floods and encroaching sea levels are being developed throughout the country, with the costs rising from an initial £340 million to £990 million.

Roger Crofts, the first head of Scottish Natural Heritage, now NatureScot, believes the concrete-based programmes are [out of date and ineffective](#). Instead he has called for a range of other measures to be adopted, including increased tree planting.

[Writing in The Times today](#), Crofts has noted that substantial sums have been allocated to tackle increased rainfall and rising sea levels in communities such as Hawick, Dumfries, Musselburgh and Langholm. As costs rise substantially the schemes “are proving to be a poor use of public money”, he said.

He claimed the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 “focuses on flood protection without considering other measures that can affect the flow of water into our rivers, such as maintenance of soil quantity and quality, measures to reduce the loss of biodiversity and to capture carbon through tree planting”. The world had moved on and the Act “stifles more integrated and multi-benefit approaches”.

He added: “Concrete is the solution, despite the energy intensity required to produce it, whereas nature can help in part at less cost and to greater benefit.”

Earlier this year it emerged that 14 of the 42 flood defence schemes outlined in risk management strategies have been completed. A further 28 are at various stages of construction and planning, with costs rising by 192 per cent.

In Musselburgh, East Lothian, the initial estimated total cost of £9 million is expected to soar to £96 million. Flood prevention work in Arbroath, Angus, which was initially expected to cost £1.4 million, is now estimated at more than £13 million, an increase of 865 per cent.

In Millport, North Ayrshire, a coastal project has risen from £12 million to almost £49 million, an estimated £74,000 for each property it is meant to protect.

The Scottish government said local authorities were responsible for the development and delivery of flood protection schemes.

A spokesman said: “This year, we will consult on a new flooding strategy for Scotland, including how we can build community flood resilience, increase use of nature-based solutions and engage a broader range of delivery partners to deliver more diverse flood management actions faster.”