

A £3.7m initiative to maximise the potential of the coastline on both sides of the Irish Sea will be launched [05.11.10].

Smart Coasts; Sustainable Communities will improve the quality of the coastal areas of Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Swansea and Dublin to boost tourism and support local economies.

The initiative has been made possible with £2.7m from the EU's Wales/Ireland Cross Border programme and will see partners from both regions collaborating to protect their shorelines by developing a new system to predict water quality in real-time.

The system involves forecasting water quality, based on sampling and analysis as well as field and coastal data, which can be linked to electronic information systems to provide bathers with up-to-date details of water conditions.

The new system will provide a better understanding of pollution sources and help maintain Wales' Blue Flag beaches by meeting the new EU Bathing Water Directive (2006) which requires water sampling at these sites.

Environment Minister Jane Davidson said:

"Improving the way we manage our coast will not only protect our shore line, but also boost its economic value by encouraging more visitors and further investment.

"We are committed to maximising sustainable use of our shores, not only for the environmental benefits but also for the increased prosperity it will deliver to people living in those communities."

Smart Coasts is led in Wales by Aberystwyth University and by University College Dublin in Ireland. The project will also work with Environment Agency Wales and Environmental Protection Agency-Ireland, City and Council of Swansea, Wicklow Council in Ireland, and Dwr Cymru Welsh Water.

The project launch coincides with an event to mark progress of £61m Ireland/Wales Cross Border programme which supports collaborative projects between partners from both regions.

Professor David Kay of Aberystwyth University said: "This real-time management approach offers both public health benefits and the opportunity to maintain existing high levels of bathing water compliance, even with the new tighter standards.

"This is vital to keeping our 'Blue Flag' awards for resort town beaches. To take advantage of this we need much more detailed understanding of the sources and pathways of potential pollution from land-based sources and throughout the coastal zone as well as the development of new predictive modelling approaches to deliver the real-time-prediction of water quality linked to electronic information systems."