

Living on the edge

Voice-over 1:

Diana Wrightson and her neighbour, Gill Beeby, are living on the edge - literally. Until last year, Diana ran a guest and tea house from her home in Happisburgh. It's a small village on the east coast of England, about three hours from London.

When Diana bought her house twenty-six years ago, the local authority assured her the sea defences, built in the late 1950s, would protect her home. But the barriers started wearing down in the 1990s and the government claims they cost too much to repair.

Diana Wrightson:

The government now has decided that rural areas are not worth saving in this... this part of the country. Er, but they're not prepared to pay property owners to go away which is what we feel should happen. So at the moment, no, there's no compensation, so when I walk away from this house all my life savings are... have gone.

Voice-over 1:

Coastal erosion forced Diana to close her guesthouse last year. The garage and the beach road behind her house are both gone, and today her house stands less than five metres from the cliff. In 1999, her neighbour bought her house for ninety-six thousand euros. Today it's worth just over one euro.

Gill Beeby:

We bought the bungalow when my husband retired from work. We had a search done and erm... we were told that it was... at least fifty years and we wouldn't have to worry about cliff erosion. Our neighbour next door to me was told when she bought her property that she would last... it would last a hundred years and now here we are on the brink.

Voice-over 1:

Diana's guesthouse was once a popular tourist destination in the small town of Happisburgh, population 850 people. The plight of Happisburgh, like other coastal towns throughout Europe's opened up a new debate. With climate change and rising sea levels now a scientific reality, the government warns it can't protect the entire coast. It's a bitter pill to swallow for local residents.

Europeans, Copyright © 2008 – Euronews, All Rights Reserved.