

# Perceptions of sea level rise: An exploratory research project

## SOSA 3300: Community Research Workshop

Emily Gilroy, Briana Kelly, Heather Longfield, & Rachel Wright

### Introduction

- Working with our client organization, the Ecology Action Centre (EAC), this project aims to address the question: ‘What are Halifax Regional Municipality residents’ perceptions of sea level rise, and what influences those perceptions?’.
- Findings will be shared with the EAC in order to deepen their understanding of why people think the way they do about sea level rise; gain insight as to how the EAC can initiate behavioural change; increase the effectiveness of the EAC’s public education initiatives.



<https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/01/13/heavy-rains-in-atlantic-canada-lead-to-flooding-power-outages-evacuations.html>

### Methodology

- The qualitative research method used for our exploratory research was focus groups.
- Focus groups allowed for a large amount of group data to be collected within the limited time constraints (Berg and Lune, 2012, p. 172).
- We conducted two focus groups with four and three participants all categorized as well-educated young adults, limiting the research’s scope to this subpopulation.
- Interview guide: composed of twelve questions to prompt discussion around participants’ perceptions of sea level rise.
- Recruitment strategies: personal connections and social media calls.

### References

- Berg, Bruce L. and Howard Lune. 2012. “Focus Group Interviewing” in *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston: Pearson. Pp. 164-195.
- Page, S. (2018). *Perceptions of Sea Level Rise*.

### Findings

#### 1. Responsibility for addressing sea level rise:

“...the starting steps need to be taken by people who put themselves in a place of power”

- Contradictions between individual and collective responsibility as the primary means of action, but agreed that everyone plays a role.
- Discussed need for “more impactful changes” by government officials through economic incentives, bursaries, and policy changes to incentivize public behavioural change and increase regulation of industry and corporations’ actions. Consensus that people in power positions also includes:
  - Social media and celebrity influencers (to act as role models for environmentally friendly behaviour)
- Concurrent ideas of individual responsibility – e.g. response to agricultural impacts was individual responsibility to alter their diets (veganism).

#### 2. Sources of knowledge that shapes perceptions:

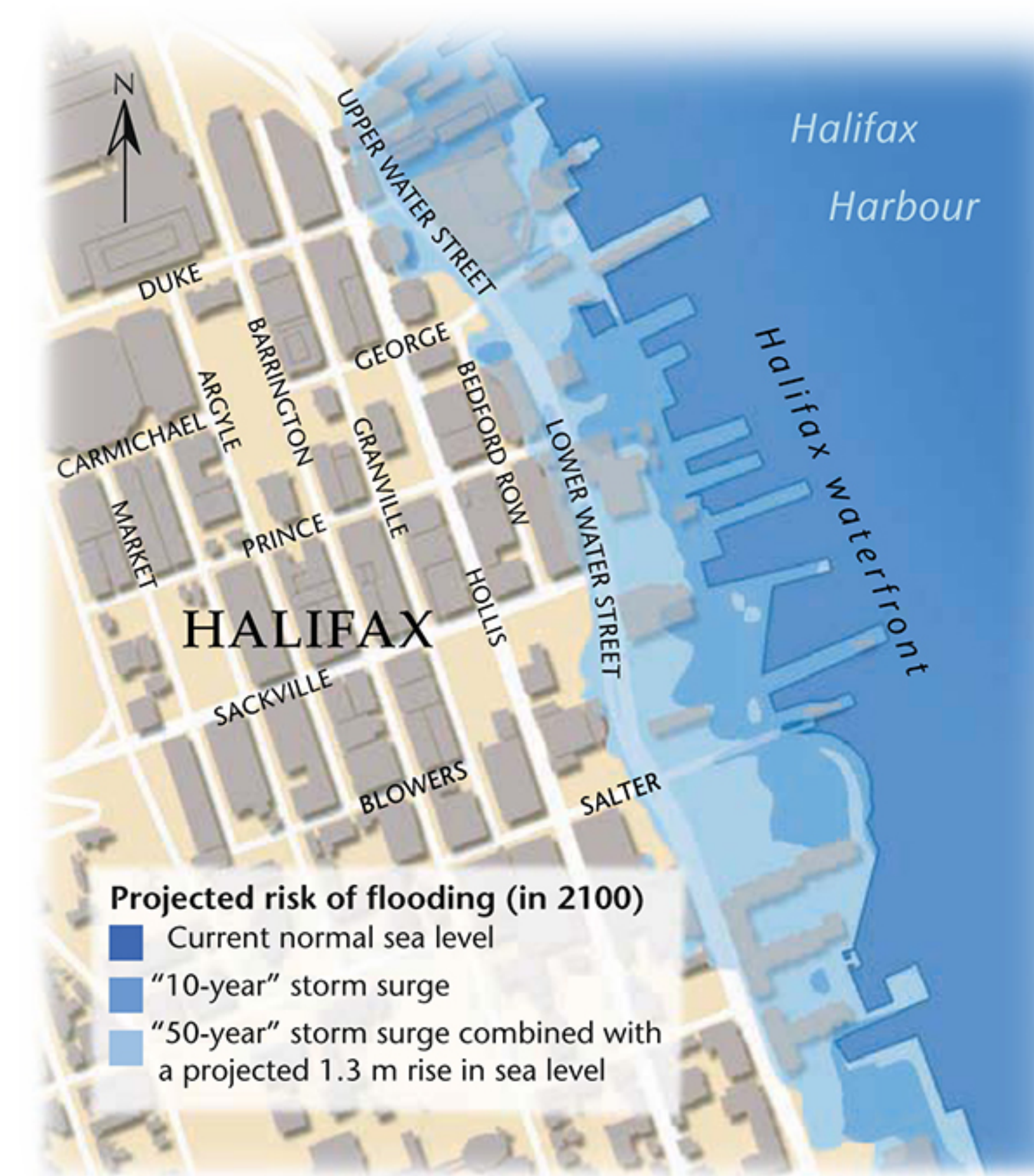
“You got to like cut down on like agriculture or something because like agriculture is the main cause of pollutants...”

- Groups identified specific sources of where existing knowledge of sea level rise stems from that influences their understanding of the issue:
  - Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture students grounded their perceptions of sea level rise in their education.
  - Social media: information on climate change issues overall and prompted thoughts about sea level rise’s impacts.
  - Social groups: generated greater awareness of sea level rise as their social groups shared information.

#### 3. Emotional responses to sea level rise:

“I’d rather it not be happening...I guess we’re gonna come to the point that we can do something. But, I can’t foresee anything I can do about it”

- Helplessness regarding the effectiveness of individual actions—minimal impacts compared to corporations’ large-scale pollution & consumption habits.
  - E.g. limiting showers to five minutes or less is meaningless in comparison to industries (e.g. mining) that use extremely high volumes of water.
- Frustration with lack of clear direction and concrete actions to combat sea level rise—expressed concern for the quality of life for future generations.



<https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/halifax-harbour-faces-rising-waters>

### Conclusions

- Participants stressed the need for collective action by those in positions of power.
- Participants gained information concerning sea level rise through personal interaction, academia and social media.
- Participants expressed desire to respond to sea level rise, but unclear direction led to feelings of frustration, helplessness, uncertainty, and disengagement.

Questions for future research:

- How can the government be prompted to take meaningful action concerning sea level rise?
- What methods can be used to effectively inform the public of individual actions they can take to combat sea level rise?

### Acknowledgements

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