



The wave criteria for coastal zoning

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THE WAVE CRITERIA FOR THE COASTAL ZONE DEFINITION

Coastal nations define along their shores a strip of intense administrative intervention entailing strong restrictions to landowners domainial powers. The exact determination of the spatial extent of this zone is always blurred by coastal dynamics which cast some degree of legal uncertainty on the adjacent real rights. Criterion adopted for this determination shall seek to be practical enough to be effectively implemented, and at the same time robust enough in order to remain reliable at least in the mid term. In short, the aim of this paper is to integrate technical tools taken from coastal engineering and coastal law in order to better understand the relationship between human societies and the coastal substratum.

The first step of our document aims to highlight those reasons that lead human societies to set back from the coast, and for this purpose we will proceed to a systematical scanning through the “Legal Findings” sections of several coastal laws. As a second step, we will make a review of the most common coastal features that constitute the final object of the administrative protection. Those coastal features, present in almost all coastal laws, are cliffs, dunes, wetlands and beaches, all of them closely related to waves. In this second point, the review will point out the reasons for the protection of those geomorphological elements and their role and utility for coastal human societies.

The last part of this document will take advantage of the elements resulting from the first two steps in order to draw some conclusions. As a first achievement, and at the light of the fundamentals for coastal administrative protection identified in the first part, we will sort out a classification of coastal setbacks, according to the leading idea by which they are based. Finally will we will put into practice the concepts obtained from both the first and second steps – fundamentals for coastal administrative intervention and the role of coastal geomorphological features – with the overall aim to clarify the interpretation of the wave criteria according to its vague formulation in the Spanish in force coastal law.

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