

17 February 2014

Rt Hon David Cameron MP
10 Downing Street
Westminster
London
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Dear Prime Minister

Open letter with regard Water Management in England and Wales

I am co-ordinating this letter on behalf of a group of professional bodies whose members regularly work together on projects designed to manage water, prevent flooding and increase resilience. The various professions comprise landscape architects, architects, engineers, hydrologists, ecologists and other specialists, who bring together the experience necessary to tackle the problems of flooding and water management. We have taken the unusual step of writing to you at this difficult time so that the government is aware that the knowledge, training and expertise of all of the professions is available to you, and we believe, urgently required.

We are concerned that the response to these major problems must be appropriate, technically sound and contribute to the long term goals of improved and sustainable water planning and management, whilst acknowledging the needs of those living and working in agriculture and the affected rural areas. We are clearly facing a wide range of difficult situations across England and Wales but it is clear that in Somerset, for example, dredging is not the sole cause of the problems that we are witnessing, and a major dredging programme may be inappropriate if the consequences are increased flooding to towns downstream.

The current situation needs clear leadership and a commitment to both an emergency response and long-term planning to avoid a future recurrence, so whilst we are pleased to hear that you will provide that leadership, it is essential that government actions are based on an informed and balanced response that builds on best practice developed over many years.

There has been much confusion about the most appropriate response to this situation. Clearly a range of emergency measures are in order to tackle the immediate crisis facing so many people. However, in the long-term, the way in which we manage, store and distribute our water, and how we rethink and plan both the natural environment, and the built environment of our towns and cities to make them more resilient, requires a clear strategy. This must be coherent and adaptable to local circumstances, to allow it to be rolled out countrywide.

We need to look at the larger catchment management issues, and how forestry, land management and soft engineered flood alleviation schemes can hold back water in the upper reaches of rivers, and how dredging may assist in the lower reaches, whilst in towns and cities we need to be considering the

planning of new development and regeneration schemes, and embark on a wide range of flood alleviation and protection measures. At the same time we need to comprehensively retro-fit Sustainable Drainage Systems, alongside SuDS schemes for all new buildings as soon as possible. Buildings and land that cannot be properly protected, but need to be, should be made resilient to withstand flooding, and we must consider carefully how and where we plan new development, and that all new housing in flood plains must be resilient when built.

A comprehensive range of water management techniques could have helped prevent the effect of water through villages, towns and over the surrounding land seen in the last few weeks.

This will require co-operation and coordination not only between the professions, but with the Water Companies, Internal Drainage Boards, local authorities, the Environment Agency, and Natural Resources Wales, all working alongside landowners and residents if the outcome is to be effective. There is a great wealth of expertise in the Environment Agency, people who are experienced in addressing these problems, as well as amongst the membership of each of our organisations. We need to mobilise and utilise that joint expertise effectively.

Whilst there will be time in the future to reflect on today's problems and to prevent their recurrence, the professions are keen to assist you now in addressing these problems, and ask that a cross departmental conference including the professions with DECC, DEFRA, DCLG, the EA and NRW, in a similar manner to that which was convened to address the problem of ash-dieback, is constituted without delay.

The commitment to provide essential funding is a useful step, but it is even more essential that this is invested appropriately, and provides the best and most sustainable outcome to both society and the affected communities.

Yours faithfully



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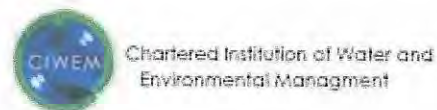


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