



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

Title: Improving Flood Risk Management in Wales

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By: Jane Davidson, Minister for the Environment, Sustainability and Housing

On 18 June the UK Climate Projections 2009 (UKCP09), produced by the Met Office Hadley Centre, were published. The Projections set out the impacts that we can expect as a result of climate change. They show that in the coming years we will experience hotter, drier summers, milder wetter winters, with an increase in storminess and the intensity of rainfall events and an increased risk of flooding and sea level rise.

Last week, I published the Climate Change Strategy: Programme of Action Consultation. It explains the actions that we plan to take to achieve cuts in our greenhouse gas emissions in devolved areas of 3 per cent by 2011 and a framework for adapting to the impacts of climate change that we cannot avoid.

A key part of this includes reducing our vulnerability to climate change by making people aware of the impacts and equipping them to make decisions that will increase our resilience and minimise our risks.

We know that one of the key risks that we face is increases in the number, frequency and ferocity of flood events across Wales. At the start of June we experienced a series of localised flooding events across Wales. I know from talking to people directly affected both how devastating floods can be and how little time people often have to prepare for an impending event.

Today the Environment Agency Wales is publishing their report '*Flooding in Wales: A National Assessment of Flood Risk*'. That report provides us with a

snapshot of the current flood risk across Wales, showing the vulnerability of our communities. It will confirm the number of properties at risk from river and coastal flooding across Wales. Many of these are subject to significant risks with many more exposed to surface water and other forms of flooding.

This supports what we have been saying for some time now. Traditional methods of tackling flooding and coastal erosion will not be enough in the future. Irrespective of the height of our defences or the capacity of our drainage systems, extreme events that exceed their capacity will occur. We need to find new ways to address the risks we face, moving to a risk management approach as outlined with our New Approaches Programme and advocated by the Pitt Review of the summer 2007 floods in England.

The Pitt Review highlighted:

- the need to clarify roles and responsibilities,
- the threat of surface water flooding to our urban communities,
- the vulnerability of our infrastructure to flooding,
- the need for partnership working and sharing information; and
- the need for stakeholders to engage with the communities at risk of flooding;

There has been confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of the operating authorities for flood and coastal erosion risk management for some time now. For some sources of flooding, like rivers, there are several operating authorities that have different responsibilities. For other sources of flooding, like surface water, there is no body with distinct responsibilities. These gaps in legislation need to be closed and clear lines of responsibility drawn. This is central to the flood and coastal erosion risk management provisions set out in the draft Flood and Water Management Bill.

Within the consultation on the draft Bill, I have proposed that the Environment Agency take on an enhanced oversight role for flood and coastal erosion risk management in Wales. They will continue to be operationally responsible for managing all flooding from main rivers and the sea; while local authorities will be similarly responsible for managing all local flooding issues. For this to operate effectively all operating authorities must co-operate and work together in the event of flooding, sharing resources and expertise. It is apparent that much closer working relationships have developed between delivery bodies in this field in recent years and I very much welcome this development. My experience in recent floods is that there is still some confusion over who people should contact if they are flooded. I am keen to remove this confusion.

One option to achieving this is for local authorities to be responsible for handling all queries on flooding events within their areas, and for coordinating the response from the relevant authorities; members of the public would then only need to contact the local authority for a detailed explanation of the situation. We are consulting on this as part of the draft Flood and Water Management Bill and I would welcome views on how we can address this and

how we can develop a flood and coastal erosion risk management system appropriate for Wales.

That system must recognise that the type of flooding that we are experiencing is changing, with increasing risks from surface water flooding as a result of intense rainfall events exceeding the capacity of existing urban drainage systems. The Pitt Review had a strong focus on surface water flood risk and the action needed to address them.

New legislation will help tackle these problems, but in advance of that legislation we are taking steps to ensure that surface water flooding is effectively managed in Wales. Through our pilot projects in Barry, Prestatyn and Pwllheli we are learning important lessons about the effective management of surface water flood risk that will inform policy responses. In each case we are directly engaging the communities affected in understanding and managing that risk more effectively.

We will also be looking at the issue of paving driveways which is compounding our surface water flooding problems. I aim to include this issue in a wider consultation paper on development management and permitted development rights.

We are also developing maps illustrating where known and potential surface water flooding problems occur. This information is being shared with Local Resilience Fora across Wales and will be used to improve current emergency plans.

Such emergency planning is essential to enable us to respond to future flooding events effectively. The Wales Flood Group is working on the development of a Wales Flood Response Framework aimed at all levels of government and emergency response partners involved in emergency planning. The Framework will set out the existing local, regional and national structures and arrangements to deal with a flooding incident and will also describe the proposed future improvements. Ensuring effective predetermined response arrangements were in place was a key message from the Pitt Review and the development of a flood framework will help ensure that our response to flooding is joined up.

Emergency planning is also key to ensuring that our essential services, including our energy, water, communications and transport infrastructure, is protected. The Pitt Review made recommendations aimed at improving infrastructure's resilience to flooding and, on 24 June 2009, the Institute of Civil Engineers published their report '*State of the Nation: Defending Critical Infrastructure*' which highlighted flooding was a particular risk to infrastructure in Wales.

Progress is being made in these areas. The Wales Utility Group provides the forum for the Assembly Government, operating authorities and utility providers in Wales to share information and ensure the co-ordinated development of resilience at key sites. We must also have a coordinated approach across the

UK to make our infrastructure more resilient to the impacts of flooding and we are working closely with Cabinet Office to take forward the Pitt Recommendations on this.

Further to this, I recognise the excellent work done by our emergency services and partner organisations in responding to flooding events. I want to ensure that our responders are given the necessary support to do their jobs effectively and safely. Therefore I have tasked the Wales Flood Group to support the flood rescue enhancement projects being led by Defra and the Wales Fire Rescue Service to ensure maximum benefit for our response arrangements in Wales.

In addition to the work on emergency planning and response, we are also working on improving our understanding of and enhancing the planning for and management of flood risks both now and in the future. To achieve this I am funding the preparation of a programme of Catchment Flood Management Plans and Shoreline Management Plans across Wales. These strategic plans will identify sustainable risk management policies for all sections of our coastline and for all catchments for the present and the future extending into the next century. These strategic plans will inform how we adapt to increasing flood and coastal erosion risks due to climate change.

Allied to this I will shortly be publishing updated Development Advice Maps (DAMs) to replace those which already form part of TAN 15: Development and Flood Risk. The updated maps will ensure that the planning of new development is informed by our latest understanding of the river and coastal flood risks facing our communities.

One of the key outcomes in the Environment Strategy action plan is to ensure that those who are at risk of flooding are aware of the risk, its consequences and the action they need to take to address it. I have tasked the Wales Flood Group to work with the Environment Agency Wales to develop an initiative that explores mechanisms to ensure the raising awareness message gets through to our communities at risk.

The additional funding I announced for the Environment Agency in December 2008 has been put to good use and the number of people registered to their telephone warning service, Floodline Warnings Direct, had increased to 47,000 by March 2009.

In February 2009 the service was enhanced by introducing on-line registration from the Environment Agency website. Those registered to the service receive free river and coastal flood warnings from the Environment Agency, and can elect to receive them by telephone, mobile, email, SMS text message or fax registration.

In April this year, I attended the launch of the new Flood Forecasting Centre which for the first time combines the expertise of the Environment Agency and the Met Office in one place. In supporting this Centre, we are ensuring that the people of Wales will receive better forecasts for future flood events that

will allow the timely and accurate issuing of warnings. Better warnings will ensure that the emergency services can make early arrangements to respond which will reduce the risk to life that floods can pose. The Centre is also at the forefront of research and development into flood forecasting and modelling, making sure improvements will continue to be made.

All of this work is critical to our preparation for and resilience to flood events. It is clear that we cannot tackle these risks alone. Our partners are vital to the successful delivery of a risk management system and we are working closely with a number of organisations from across Wales and the UK.

Local authorities, emergency services and the Environment Agency all play vital roles, but I am also keen to work more closely with the Third Sector and with groups dedicated to supporting flood victims.

I recently met with the Chief Executive of the National Flood Forum to discuss their role of supporting and assisting communities in Wales affected by flooding. I see the organisation as a key in player providing direct support to communities at risk in Wales and they have agreed to form part of a new Pilot Study which will be established to learn the lessons of the recent floods in Wales.

Key to recovery from flooding is access to funds to repair and replace damaged property. During the 2007 summer floods the insurance industry played a major role in helping the communities recover.

It is important that flood insurance remains affordable and as widely available as possible so that householders and small businesses continue to be able to protect themselves from the financial cost of flooding. Today I am pleased to be able to announce a new *Statement of Principles* between the Welsh Assembly Government and the Association of British Insurers. This is an agreement for the Welsh Assembly Government to commit to actions to mitigate flood risk in order that insurers commit to continue to provide insurance to the majority of households and businesses at risk from flooding under certain conditions.

Continued access to insurance is vital for many, as we know from bitter experience that the areas most affected by flood events are often those where our poorest communities live. Action in promoting general insurance to low level income households is already being taken forward by the Welsh Assembly Government through Community Housing Cymru, the Chartered Institute of Housing and through our Financial Inclusion Strategy.

Central to all of this work is funding. Earlier this year I was pleased to announce that we had secured £30 million European Convergence funds to invest in flood and coastal risk management in West Wales and the Valleys. This funding will be used to promote a grants scheme to support operating authorities to progress flood risk management schemes.

To date, we have confirmed funding for the first twelve schemes to benefit from this new money, including high risk areas such as Tywyn, Conwy, Borth

and Rhydyfelin. Further approvals are expected later in the programme. The funds will support both the construction of flood defences and other means of risk reduction such as raising awareness in the affected communities and building resilience to flooding to enable more rapid recovery. I am particularly pleased at the partnership approach to address these issues and acknowledge the work being done by local authorities, the Environment Agency Wales and Dwr Cymru Welsh Water to progress the schemes.

Significant funds have been made available to match fund this programme of works, including an £8 million contribution from the Welsh Assembly's Strategic Capital Investment Fund, which underlines the Assembly Government's commitment to addressing flood and coastal erosion risk in Wales. We are in further discussions with the Welsh European Funding Office regarding possible bids for additional funds on top of the money already secured.

To ensure that we invest the money we have available wisely I have asked the Environment Agency to develop a Long Term Investment Strategy for Wales. This will provide greater certainty and visibility about our approach to investment and help us plan an effective response to the likely impact of climate change including extreme weather events. It will provide us with a more efficient use of resources to effectively deliver over the longer term. The strategy will be in place by the Autumn 2009.

I am committed to ensuring that we make use of a wide range of intervention measures to supplement hard defences on our rivers and coast, including raising awareness of the risks of flooding amongst our vulnerable communities and increasing their resilience to flood events. There is already a significant amount of work underway, and more to be done if we are to develop a flood and coastal erosion risk management system appropriate for the needs of Wales and Welsh communities.