# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **Reservoir Safety Reform** |
| **DATE**  | **04 November 2024** |
| **BY** | **Huw Irranca-Davies, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs** |

Reservoir safety in England and Wales is currently legislated through the Reservoirs Act 1975 (‘the Act’). The aim of the Act is to protect people against the uncontrolled release of water from large-raised reservoirs. In August 2019 following heavy rain, there was a partial collapse of the dam at Toddbrook reservoir in Derbyshire, which saw over 1500 people evacuated from the town of Whaley Bridge for several days.

At the time of the incident, Toddbrook reservoir was fully compliant with existing legislation and had recently been inspected. This prompted serious questions over whether the current reservoir safety regime in England and Wales is fit for purpose and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs commissioned Professor David Balmforth to undertake an independent review of reservoir safety in England. Although the Balmforth review was an England only review, the subsequent 2021 report identified weaknesses in the existing reservoir safety regime relevant for both England and Wales.

Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales are fully committed to strengthening and reforming our reservoir safety regime.We have implemented changes in Wales which align with recommendations made by Professor Balmforth and work continues to deliver further reform.

We already work closely with our UK Government colleagues and we have now joined the Reservoir Safety Reform Programme. Working together with Defra and the Environment Agency, will ensure there is consistency across roles and responsibilities for reservoir safety engineers who work across both nations. There are 3 main areas for reform:

1. Creating a more modern approach to hazard management.
2. Improving the supply and capacity of reservoir safety engineers.
3. Updating the approach to regulation and enforcement.

Each of these areas will be supported by a number of reforms.

Furthermore, we are currently collaborating on the development of a new hazard classification system, and have supported UK Government colleagues with insight, advice and guidance in working with small raised reservoirs and how they might be represented within the new classification system.

Both Welsh Government and UK Government recognise the value of a shared safety regime and I am delighted this collaborative cross-border working will continue. Today, I am pleased to confirm that Wales will join England in a joint reservoir safety reform programme to modernise legislation.

Whilst this is a pivotal moment for reservoir safety, the central principles which guide our approach in Wales will remain – for example, use of qualified civil engineers to undertake inspections and supervisions. However, these principles will be applied more on the basis of risk and proportionality. Our vision is to modernise the regulation of reservoir safety in Wales, to reduce the risk to those who live and work in the communities downstream and the natural environment, and to ensure reservoirs are resilient to future impacts of climate change.

I am aware we have a comparatively small population of reservoir owners in Wales. However, as the Toddbrook incident demonstrated, reservoir owners play a significant role in ensuring the safety of communities downstream and it is vital that everyone is aware of their respective responsibilities. I encourage Members to consult the [Citizen Space (Wales) website](https://ymgynghori.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/flood-and-incident-risk-management-rheoli-perygl-llifogydd-a-digwyddiadau/reservoir-safety-reform) which contains further information.