

*The 76th Annual Conference of the Association of Drainage Authorities was held on 13 November at One Great George Street at Westminster. This report presents an extended summary of the Conference. The report includes Association business, Committee Reports, a presentation and a summary of the Question Time Panel.*

## **Henry Cator OBE, Chairman of ADA**

Henry welcomed everyone to the conference, commenting how the blue skies and autumn leaves on the walk to One Great George Street gave the appearance that all was well with the world, while Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines has reminded everyone just how quickly these appearances can change and how devastating those changes can be. Henry told the delegates that part of his message was about how ADA members could prevent disasters happening in England and Wales.

Moving on, Henry introduced ADA's most recent report, 'The Value of Water Level Management to the Economy', commenting that, in the wake of the financial crisis of the last five years, Government are trying to promote a strong and healthy economy. However, Henry expressed concern about a lack of understanding, both by the general public and by some parts of Government, regarding the importance of water level management to the nation's economy and food security, stating that almost two thirds of agricultural land lies within Internal Drainage Boards. Referencing Sir John Beddington's 2011 Foresight report, which stated that by the year 2025 50% more food would need to be produced in order to feed the growing population, Henry reminded delegates this was only 17 harvests away.

Touching upon the ongoing subject of reductions to the Environment Agency's maintenance budget, Henry said: "...it is not a luxury service that we are providing. I put to you that this is absolutely fundamental to the safeguarding of our economy. But the trouble is we take it rather for granted because everybody just expects the job to carry on being done... while everybody says you haven't got any money to do it...", before suggesting the importance of reminding the Treasury of the amount of work that is required in order to keep assets functioning effectively.

Moving on to a more sombre topic, Henry informed members of the Welsh Government's decision to transfer Caldicott and Wentlooge, Powysland and Lower Wye IDBs to Natural Resources Wales in 2015. Henry said that, although there was no criticism of the work Caldicott and Wentlooge IDB carried out regarding flood risk, there is now a keener focus on

ensuring that IDBs have the correct governance in place.

On a more positive note, Henry commented on the Public Sector Cooperation Agreement, which will enable IDBs to carry out work on main rivers for the Environment Agency without having to go through the tender process.

Looking to the future, Henry explained that the final point from ADA's 2010-13 business plan, the incorporation of ADA, would be in place by April 2014, bringing it in line with many other membership organisations. The incorporation will also entail changes to both the Executive Committee and to the Branch Structure, with Henry saying: "I see the strength of ADA in the future coming through the branches, because I think local representation [and] local knowledge is going to be so key in communicating the messages that we need as ADA... the people that are making the decisions."

Before handing the platform to Anne McIntosh, Henry thanked those who volunteered to serve on IDBs, pointing out that generally, when England and Wales suffer extreme weather events, IDBs are ready for them.

## **Opening address: Anne McIntosh MP, Vice-President of ADA**

Anne opened her speech reassuring the assembled delegates that she would be brief, but that the AGM would begin with her bid to remain Vice President of ADA.

Echoing Henry's closing remarks, Anne thanked board members and drainage boards for the important work they carry out in keeping agriculture land free for production, and remarked how pleased she was to see Yorkshire so well represented.

Anne began by explaining work carried out on a pilot project in Pickering called Slow the Flow aimed at working with nature to prevent flooding in Pickering, which has been happening every two to three years. Slow the Flow aims to work with nature, funding trees, encouraging small dams made of natural materials and using peat bogs, aiming to retain water upstream with future plans for a bund to be created. Since the project

began in 2009 there have been no major flooding incidents.

### Surface Water Flooding

Anne explained that surface water runoff is becoming a large issue, and is one recommendation in the Pitt Report which is currently unresolved. Although when the water is on the road it is the responsibility of the Highways Agency or Local Authority, once the runoff goes onto land where groundwater is already high it can cause problems, or, when flowing into combined sewage pipes, it can burst through the pipes or come back onto the roads. Anne told members of her hope that surface water flooding would be included in the Water Bill.

### Maintenance

Moving on to maintenance Anne commented that maintenance of existing flood defences are increasingly going to need to be carried out either by drainage boards or land owners, rather than the Environment Agency, commenting “Whether you are a climate sceptic or not we are seeing, as Henry referred to, unprecedented weather patterns. That is something increasing that we are going to have to adapt to. I think there is a lot to be said for restoring the balance between the maintenance budget and the capital expenditure budget”. She then explained that the EFRA Flood Funding Enquiry report, which Anne had chaired, had come to the same conclusion, and was pleased to see that the capital budget for flood defence projects was increasing.

Anne praised the adoption of the partnership approach, whilst acknowledging that it can be difficult to find funding partners, particularly during times of austerity. She stated that she was concerned that only £20 million per year is spent in England maintaining and clearing waterways, saying that “It’s a bit like the health service. We accept there is never going to be enough money to go around. I think we have to accept there is not going to be new money, but we do seem to keep going back to the same people to contribute.”

Anne paid tribute to the work that drainage boards carried out, saying that both the EFRA Committee and the Conservative Party would like to see more drainage boards where they aren’t already in place, ensuring that work gets carried out. She commented that the Pitt Report stated that maintenance work should both be done and be seen to be done, suggesting that the Environment Agency and Internal

Drainage Boards could work together on an annual programme of maintenance which could be publicised by both parties, in order that the public know that work is being done.

Anne touched on the subject of the Watercourse Maintenance pilots which are currently taking place throughout England, mentioning that she is hopeful that these will work. The hope is that the review will see benefits to farmland, as the general public are unlikely to be happy with being told that less money is being spent on protecting properties from flooding.

Fresh from being presented with the first copy of ADAs latest report: ‘The Value of Water Level Management to the Economy’, Anne said that the EFRA Select Committee are currently inviting evidence on food security. She commended ADA on their report, which recognises the importance of drainage boards on national food production and food security.

Following her address Anne took questions and comments from the delegates:

### Sewage deposition

Keith Moore (Goole & Airmyn Drainage Board) reflected on two recent flooding events in his area and explained to Anne that one of the major consequences of such events was that Yorkshire Water’s pumping facility released hundreds of gallons of raw sewage into the drainage board’s watercourses (of which the drainage board is still seeking compensation). As a member of the local authority (East Riding, Yorkshire Council), Keith regretfully reported to Anne how difficult it has been to get a response from Yorkshire Water about what went wrong and why this has occurred. He put it to Anne that there needs to be a change in legislation for water companies, such as Yorkshire Water, to be made more accountable for such negligence.

Anne reflected on her own experience and explained that although it was a step of progression that the Environment Agency is now recognised as a statutory consultee in new developments, perhaps water companies should be too as new builds lead to greater surface runoff and therefore exhaust the capabilities of pipe and drainage systems. Anne did also counter the opinion and said she has had good experience of Yorkshire Water meeting to discuss issues, but stressed: “the surface water issue, mixing with ground water, coming into the combined pipes and sewers has to be addressed. It cannot fall to the water customer,

who again is each and every one of us... I think you have got to have a sustainable drainage system so that the surface water can be retained and doesn't go into that combined sewer pipe."

## Investment revenue

### Investment revenue

David Thomas (Middle Level Commissioners) expressed his concerns over investment in revenue maintenance works and how the Government portrays that they are investing heavily in flood risk when, in his experience, the people on the ground carrying out the works complain that there is not enough money to carry out maintenance works. He went on to describe how the Water Framework Directive has been cemented at the top of the priority list by Government whilst capital schemes are now seen as an afterthought. David put to Anne that this should be the opposite, especially with long-term planning for climatic changes in the UK.

Anne responded: "The money that goes to the drainage boards, I believe there is a strong argument, should remain with the drainage boards because the Environment Agency now don't have the engineers, they don't have the resources and your money seems to be going into a central pot and not used for the maintenance for which it was intended. So I believe that would be a radical first step forward given that you are not going to get more money." Anne then pointed out it is the Treasury that needs persuading and is "unfinished business" from the Pitt Review.

Meurig Raymond (Deputy President of the National Farmers Union), although initially paying tribute to Anne's food security statement about managing water levels on grade I farmland, continued the debate on maintenance revenues and stressed that the difference between capital and revenue budgets was too rigid. He referred to the Government's statements about 'localism' (decision-making down at the local level) but failed to see any leeway when moving any money from capital to maintenance for the greater good of the locals.

Anne stated that we must be careful in taking money away from area so quickly as with insurance companies, if the Government does not pay a certain level then we run the risk of the insurance companies walking away from vulnerable areas and people's homes and businesses will suffer. She concluded: "I think that one way around it is allowing the money that is raised by

the drainage boards to protect the farmland should be spent on protecting the farmland and should not go into the central pot... I would argue at the moment that [money raised through drainage rates] is not being spent in the rural areas where it was intended to be spent for the purposes for which it is raised."

## ADA Committees

Henry Cator presented the Executive Committee, Policy & Finance Committee and Technical & Environmental Committee reports, and thanked those that serve on them.

Attention was drawn to the incorporation of ADA and upcoming amendment to the branch structure, aiming to ensure that all branches function in the same way. The New Year will see a meeting of branch chairmen and secretaries to ensure that, on incorporation, a common structure can be rolled out.

Comments were raised regarding the future maintenance of SuDS, aquatic herbicide trials and the issue of water companies discharging into IDB watercourse without permission or payment. Henry also paid thanks to North Level IDB for the work put in to make the Demonstration such a success.

Matthew Cullen: 'The future of UK flood insurance'

Matt Cullen (Policy Advisor for Flooding, Association of British Insurers (ABI)) opened by mentioning that this was the second time he had addressed an ADA audience; his first being SuDS themed and outside of his comfort zone, while assuring the audience that his presentation at the Conference today was on a subject he was much more familiar with.

Matt explained that insurers faced two problems regarding flooding – one being the high cost of flooding claims when such an event takes place, and the unpredictability of events when compared to other insurance risks, for example theft. The flooding of 2007 signalled a shift in flood insurance, with insurers dealing with 185,000 claims totalling approximately £3 billion (around one third of all UK domestic property insurance turnover). Since 2007, flood events have occurred more regularly with big events in 2009 and 2012 and smaller, but not insignificant ones in 2008, 2010 and 2011. The need to have the capital to pay out when events happens has made some insurance companies consider how and in which markets they operate.

Flood risk mapping has meant that insurance companies

are increasingly able to map risk, leading to households in high risk areas finding that they are struggling to afford flood insurance, if any is available to them at all. In order to safeguard flood insurance the Statement of Principles was introduced, which ran from 2000 to June 2013. The Statement of Principles meant that insurers would guarantee to cover their existing household and small business customers, provided the properties were built prior to 2009, in exchange for a number of commitments regarding flood risk management from the Government. Following the ABI's statement that they would not renew the Statement of Principles in June 2013 a negotiation process has been taking place between the ABI, Defra and Government, investigating a sustainable model to take into the future. The outcome of these discussions is Flood RE.

Flood RE is planned to offer flood insurance to any home at a set price, based on the council tax band of the property. Should insurers feel that they cannot offer cover at the set price, the flood risk will be passed to Flood RE, which will then cover the flood risk, rather than the insurer. In order to compensate for the small proportion of properties which are in this position (around 1-2%) an industry levy will be introduced, which will total £180 million per year. This will be distributed amongst all policy holders, not just those in flood risk area, as a £10.50 charge per policy. The Government have agreed that they will take primary responsibility (which is as yet undefined) for any event leading to a 1:200 aggregate loss, which in financial terms totals approximately £2.4 billion. Government have also agreed to increase the capital budget for flood risk management, which was one of the conditions of the ABI signing up to a memorandum of understanding. The memorandum means that Flood RE is Government's preferred policy option, but the process has not been completed as there are still issues which need to be resolved, such as whether the public procurement process will need to be followed in order to procure all the services required and how the Government get state aid clearance from the European Commission.

Matt stated that the ABI had not requested any specific commitment regarding maintenance or revenue funding in their negotiations, but said "That doesn't mean we don't think it's important, ... we fully support the lobbying goals of people that I've heard even in the last 20 minutes, in terms of managing not only capital expense on flood risk management but also maintenance expense as well. That is something we will be lobbying on strongly in the coming year."

In his conclusion, Matt hoped that the explanation of Flood RE had demonstrated what the insurance industry is trying to achieve, and provided reassurance that they are doing the best for those people who are at risk of flooding around the UK.

## Question Time

The 76th Annual Conference's Question Time session extended the heated debate around the major issues affecting water level management in England and Wales. This year's panel comprised of Jean Venables (ADA Chief Executive); Matt Cullen (Policy Advisor: Flooding, Association of British Insurers); Pete Fox (Head of FCERM Strategy & Investment, Environment Agency (EA)); Lewis Baker (Flood & Coastal Risk Management Team, Defra); and Rob Cathcart (Senior Specialist Freshwater & Wetlands, Natural England). Delegates' questions were focused around: Somerset Levels, the planning stage in development, Welsh IDBs and maintenance funding.

## Somerset Levels

Nick Stevens (Somerset Drainage Board Consortium) opened the debate with his and his Board's experience of the 2012 flooding in the Somerset Levels and Moors, which has led to wide scale flooding of individual properties, businesses, roads and farmland across an area of about 7,000 hectares. Nick continued to describe that, despite various visits from previous Ministers and the good work of local MPs, the prospect of substantive funding for dredging and maintenance works of main rivers seems limited as the priorities for funding are weighted heavily against rural areas. Comparing the millions of grant-in-aid funding being spent on returning much of the farmland and wetland region of the country to favourable condition SSSI status and to promote the management activities promoted by HLS schemes, Nick expressed concern that without urgent investment in these areas of agriculture, which also contain internationally valued habitats and species, will demise and the UK economy will suffer, and asked the panel to suggest how the funding priorities and mechanisms can be changed to more accurately value this complex and fragile area for the future sustainability and security of the area.

Lewis Baker opened with acknowledgement of how bad the situation had been in Somerset and described that partnership funding arrangements set up in the area are designed to extend the availability of funding so that there will be a Government contribution to schemes that might not otherwise have secured

funding, but recognised that it may not meet the ambition of local people. Referring to the valuation of the farmland, Lewis reminded Nick that Anne McIntosh MP mentioned her Regional Flood and Coastal Committee will be addressing this. The Chairman, Henry Cator, added that his friends and colleagues in that area believe the problem has been exacerbated by the lack of maintenance on the rivers Parrett and Tone over a number of years. Pete Fox replied by highlighting that investment from the Environment Agency is governed by two major factors: reducing budgets and focus on people and property, but that pinch point dredging works has and is being carried out in the area to ease the conditions.

Lewis added that the key to Somerset (and to all areas of special drainage needs) is to have a vision of the future that incorporates climate change to best handle the increase in flooding. Jean reminded the panel and audience that when she started the role it was clear that politicians regarded IDBs as agents purely for rural and farming benefits and not as managers of water levels for more than a tenth of the land of England and Wales combined. She expressed that if river maintenance is not included in the cost-benefit calculations of Government funding and, ultimately, policy then the UK economy will suffer (as if highlighted in ADA's newest booklet: 'Value of Water Level Management: Economy' – downloadable from the ADA website).

Nick responded with concern that the panel had not suggested a suitable mechanism to obtain more public spending, and that with his experience of talking to locals in his area that people would be prepared to 'pay a little more for better service', but that his County Council would not be prepared to increase the maximum spending in the district. Jean recalled that Gloucestershire was looking at putting a drainage element on their council charge to do works in their area in the wake of the 2007 flooding. However, Pete replied that he thought it would fall foul now of the accountability rules that are set to come in because it would be seen as an additional tax. Jean asked the question: 'What if the locals vote in favour of this?' – of which Pete agreed this could happen but that a referendum would be needed to change the law.

Offering an opportunity for other members of the audience to contribute to the Somerset Levels debate, Brian Watkis (Somerset Drainage Board Consortium) pointed out that no one had yet mentioned the fact that the nuclear power station, Hinckley Point C, is to be built partly in an IDB district and that the

electricity would need to get in and out. Additional to this, Brian asked what would happen if there was a major flood event during the construction phase of the power station and that given there is clearly enough money to build the power station, why is there not any available for flood risk. Tony Bradford (Vice Chairman of the Parrett Drainage Board) put it to the panel that engineers in the area have concluded that by dredging main rivers it will prevent prolonged flooding of up to five or six weeks, as seen in 2012, and that in his experience the watercourses in his area are scarce of wildlife, which have ultimately drowned from the higher water levels so there would be no conservation restrictions of major dredging in those parts. Tony added that common sense should prevail in these situations.

Ray Adlam (Somerset Drainage Board Consortium, Wessex RFCC member) explained to the panel that if it flooded profoundly now the Somerset area would not be able to handle the excess water, as it was still recovering from the 2012 flood events, and would need ten years to fully recover. Ray stated that the drains in his area are blocked with silt and that the drainage ditches are in the same situation and maintenance/dredging needed to be carried out immediately, but that funding is not available to do so. He then expressed distress that his drainage board would lose its reputation that has been built up over decades, and that £20 million had been spent on favourable conditions (e.g. SSSIs) in this area against only £4 million on river maintenance. Rob Catchcart responded with examples of investment schemes by Natural England (of which landowners have signed up to receive payments), such as high level environment stewardship schemes which help maintain conditions on their land that supports wildlife, especially breeding and wintering waders, to try and make sure that we meet our national and international commitments to nurture conservation at Somerset Levels. Rob stated it has brought benefits to the environment but also to local landowners as well in terms of income and of new water level management infrastructure.

Pete added that the Environment Agency has to protect frontline revenue funding on maintenance and that between 2011 and 2014, the maintenance funding will reduce from £156 million in 11/12 down to £147 million in 13/14 (6% reduction). He continued by saying that: "at the same time the SR10 spending review that we got at the start of this administration determined that our revenue funding would drop 4% per year. So at the same time the overall funding for revenue has

dropped by 12%. So we have in real terms protected the money we are spending on the maintenance of structures, the operation of structures and conveyance of rivers as much as we possibly can.”

James Grant (Chairman, Witham Fourth District IDB) echoed his concerns for Lincolnshire and challenged Pete and Rob’s primary focus on enhancing the environment rather than people and communities. Rob made clear that it was not the case that doing works for conservation objectives are somehow contributing to the flooding that has been seen in Somerset Levels or in other places in the country and that he is not convinced that channel management always has a significant effect in terms of reducing significant flood risk. He continued to say: “What I am saying is that I don’t always believe it to be the case, that all forms of river maintenance would make a difference when you have a large flood event like we have had in many parts of the country in recent years.”

John Duggleby (Beverley and North Holderness IDB) expressed regret that Anne McIntosh MP was no longer present to hear these comments as this was a political issue, and posed the conundrum of what the Environment Agency would do if IDB refused to pay their precepts.

Referring to a previous point, Lewis praised the work of IDBs and encouraged them to gather evidence to support the need for funding and also highlighted the fact that there will be a £5 million increase in maintenance funding for 2015-16, which he thought showed that Ministers do recognise that issue needs addressing.

Peter Burton (Chairman, Bluntisham IDB) described that in the Ouse Valley there was a 20 mile stretch which has been declared an area of outstanding natural beauty which has received no direct funding or work to achieve this status. He continued saying that various charities were bidding for funds from Natural England, Defra and the EA with regards to this area which are diverting critical funds elsewhere. Rob responded by saying that once an area has been designated this status there is certain management that is required within those areas to maintain the fabric of those areas and is Government policy that we should have those areas designated. Rob also highlighted that other income streams emerge from such sites through tourism which benefit the local area.

John Duckitt (Danvm Drainage Commissioners) referred to a recent newspaper article declaring that

the EA was going to abandon maintenance on the River Swale, Ure and Nidd (located in Yorkshire). John asked the panel who would be maintaining these rivers and then started to read an extract from a letter in the newspaper saying: “Volunteers are being sought to help keep the River Calder at Mytholmroyd clear of vegetation and help reduce the risk of flooding. Contractors are inviting local people to attend training days to learn how to tackle the problem.” He stated: “Now isn’t this drainage gone mad? I think we must be the laughing stock of Europe as regards land drainage.” Switching back to the Somerset Levels debate, John stated that Owen Patterson admitted that the lack of drainage and river maintenance was having an adverse effect on the flood situation and asked the panel if he was speaking the truth. Pete denied knowledge of the situation John referred to in Yorkshire but explained that Defra has been asking the EA to encourage greater partnership cooperation in delivering flood risk reduction from landowners and from riparian owners and in built up areas that can include riparian owners of commercial properties and so forth.

David Thomas (Middle Level Commissioners) emphasised the issue of lack of funding, of which Lewis echoed Pete’s previous point of encouraging more parties to help with maintenance. Lewis explained that the seven pilots launched recently by the EA were a step towards stripping back some of the red tape that that actually gets in the way of people carrying out their own maintenance on watercourses so the industry can have an improved consenting system for maintenance works. Jean responded by highlighting that recent duties, such as the Eel Regulations, will make maintenance more complicated and expensive just to comply with the Water Framework Directive and other such directives, which ultimately do not do anything towards flood risk management.

Jeremy Walker (Board Member, Environment Agency) commented on listening to the whole debate and referred back to the audience’s view that the EA prioritises the environment over people and stated that the key measure that the EA is judged on by their ‘political masters’ is the number of properties and people protected by [flood risk] investment – of which Jeremy declared the EA was exceeding to date. He did point out, however, that there are also environmental objectives too where a win/win situation can occur, such as the recent Medbury habitat scheme on the south coast which benefits the environment and local community. Referring back to using common sense, he emphasised that it needed to be used when thinking that the answer to Somerset Levels is just about

improving channel conveyance only, but recognised that it was a key piece of the jigsaw and that the issue needed to be approached in a longer-term context. Jeremy concluded his point with regards that for every pound spent on one area it is another pound not spend elsewhere and partnership working and cooperation is critical in allocating the investment with the best return.

### **Flood risk – planning stage**

Moving on, Richard Walker (Danvm Drainage Commission) asked Matt Cullen why there were so many planning applications that had been successful in areas of high flood risk that had not drawn upon the great local knowledge of IDBs, and suggested that insurance companies should put pressure on local authorities to allow IDBs to have a real consultative impact by commenting on planning applications. Matt agreed that the whole planning stage “desperately” needed to reform and that “there is some doubt within the insurance industry about whether the new planning arrangements are fit for purpose in the long-term for delivering that outcome. That doesn’t just mean if IDBs start looking at planning applications, any problems with the planning system are going to be solved... I think there are also potential changes to the role that the Environment Agency has in the process that might be investigated down the lines.”

Keith Moore (Goole & Airmyn Drainage Board) reinforced John’s point and proposed that with the assistance of ADA and other partners that now was the time IDBs should be statutory consultees in planning matters. Lewis said the Department of Communities and the Local Government are the leads on planning matters of which he said were keen to limit the number of statutory consultees within the planning system to keep the process moving. However, Lewis said he can see IDBs being important in the planning system and would take this point back with him to his colleagues.

Reg Edwards (Councillor for Milton Keynes) explained that his experience of the fast development of Milton Keynes shows that with more new builds, surface water is increasing which is causing underground drainage to suffer, and identified that the Community Infrastructure Levy does not currently include money designated for drainage.

### **Welsh IDBs**

Peter Bateson (Secretary, ADA Lincolnshire Branch) asked that: “given the situation in Wales, what could

ADA do to persuade boards that governance is actually a mind-set and not just a list of documents on a website?” Jean agreed that there had to be a change in mind-set and stated that there was never a problem with Caldicot & Wentlooge IDB looking after their watercourses, but the concern was what was (or not) in the filing cabinets. She addressed the room and reminded all IDB representatives that it is just as important to keep all paperwork up to date as it is to keep watercourses clear and IDBs should do everything in their power to comply with all legislation as well as administration. Jean went on to say that a growing issue is trying to remove an incompliant elected board member from an IDB, and suggested that it was up to the board’s Chairman to put moral pressure on the member to stand down, but stated there was very little you could do in that type of situation. Whilst Lewis agreed with Jean’s point he went on to say: “...it’s not simply just that you sign up to these governance documents and that’s it. That actually it’s the culture within boards that needs to be really effective in ensuring good governance. It’s going to be really important to ensuring the strong future of IDBs in England.” He reassured the audience that the current situation in Wales is purely a Welsh Government issue and that in England there has been no suggestion about dissolving IDBs, that Ministers do value the work of IDBs, and that Defra will be working very closely with the two IDBs that cross the Welsh border.

### **Conclusion**

The Chairman concluded Question Time by explaining to the panel and attendees that although the comments from the audience may seem hostile what they were hearing was a mix of passion for their work and frustration in being unable to deliver high standards to their respected districts due to outside restrictions. He ended the Conference by saying: “My plea is that please, Natural England, the Environment Agency, DEFRA, use this resource out here [pointing to the delegates] because as the gentleman from Welland and Deeping said ‘You have got some of the finest land drainage brains in the country sitting in this room.’ They are here to help you. We are all in this together because we all passionately want to carry out water level management for the benefit of the environment, for the benefit of agriculture, for the benefit of people who want to build homes and live in our towns and cities. As well as for transport, as well as for energy, as well as for the economy. So let us work together, please.”

Guest speaker, Erik Kraaij: EUWMA & Unie van Waterschappen

Erik Kraaij (Secretary General, EUWMA and Director, Unie van Waterschappen) opened his address with an introduction to EUWMA – European Union of Water Management Associations – who collectively reduce flood risk to 55 million hectares of land and to hundreds of millions of people living below sea level. Representatives from nine countries meet every year to share knowledge, discuss European legislation, and regional and local water management issues.

Moving on to Erik's experiences in the Netherlands, he described the political situation as "stable" although suggested that the current government have a focus to get rid of the water boards. Despite this, Erik assured delegates that their association carries on with their day-to-day activities with no fear, as is expected by the nation. He reported that parts of the Netherlands received 800mm of rainfall in one day during 2012 which greatly stretched the resources of the water boards.

Erik then emphasised the importance of economics in water management. He recalled that in 1998, a similar event happened in the Netherlands which resulted in 10-20% of the agricultural land being completely flooded. This led to the water boards to become more prepared for such events through heavy investment to avoid excessive future costs of maintenance, which lessened the impact in 2012. Erik highlighted the difference between the Netherlands and UK water boards: the former is taxed effectively to fully cover maintenance costs whilst the UK water boards are yet to meet this system.

Publications, such as ADA's 'Value for Water Level Management' series, can help persuade legislation change and highlight the economic importance of managing water levels in the UK – as Erik explained. As shown by the weather extremes in Germany which suffered an economic loss of €8 billion to the economy, Erik described: "...we have in the Netherlands a system which is called 'interest, pay, say'. So that means that people who are interested in the water management and the water level management have to pay and have a say in the decision making of the water boards." He continued to explain that what ADA and IDBs can relate to European associations is that unsound water management leads to considerable damage of agriculture, the environment, infrastructure and transportation in the nation. The expenditure of water management in the Netherlands last year totalled €6

billion, which equates to 1.1% of GDP for the country.

Peter Glas (President, Unie van Waterschappen) who spoke at last year's Conference presented delegates with the proposal for a new law – Delta Funding – which is a new system of investment for new works on the river dykes and coastal defence in the Netherlands. Erik gladly relayed the news that this law has now been passed in parliament and comes into force in January 2014. However, like in England, Erik described, the new funding will be half for maintenance and half for investment and reflects a treasury with other priorities. Water boards in the Netherlands are 'not just sitting back complaining and not doing their jobs' but taking proactive discussions with the government to see how the gap between investment needed and money available can be filled. So far it has been successful, with the government agreeing to match the money raised by the water boards (€180 million) to reach a total of €360 million per year. The money will be used to improve 700km of river dykes over the next 12 years.

However, it is not all good news in the Netherlands, as Erik explained; an international study (in cooperation with the Organisation of Economic Development) presented statistics such as: "...the awareness gap amongst citizens about water management is significant in urban areas... citizens feel rather safe despite the fact that one third of flood defence systems are not up to standard". Much like the 8,000 professionals of the water construction industry in the Netherlands, an aging employee level is of growing concern as there is an ever apparent gap between the expertise of water management between young and old. Erik emphasised that it is crucial for the livelihoods of all water systems that the knowledge is passed down and the young are educated in such matters. Water boards need to create employability and investment in providing such services as summer internships during holidays for younger people. On a larger scale, water boards in the Netherlands are also trying to get water management as part of secondary school curriculums.

In concluding his address, Erik referred to EUWMA's recent European declaration which stated: "Future challenges such as climate change and floods resilience require extra care and therefore also adequate funding. Together we can make sure that the hundred million Europeans that live below sea level feel safe."

### **President's address**

Lord de Ramsey (ADA President) started his address by thanking all attendees, panel members, guests and



speakers of the day and expressed how honoured he was to continue his role as President.

Reflecting on his father's previous address to ADA in 1962, Lord de Ramsey compared the key messages of his previous addresses to his father's which all have similar priorities: to provide services that enhance the safety to properties, to the people and to farm land and food security. Drawing from history the fact that his father's speech was only 16 years after WWII and at that time 80,000 Dutch people died from starvation in the last 18 months of the war, he echoed the importance of food security and how IDBs (and water boards in other countries) are an integral part of maintaining food supplies for its peoples.

Referencing a quote from Tacitus in AD 93; 'the worse the State, the more the laws', Lord de Ramsey expressed his worry over the amount of red tape that is active in today's systems that may prevent hardworking ADA members in carrying-out their jobs effectively and for the good of the nation. He continued to highlight that of all the total land mass of the world, Europe has 10% of the world's population but has a staggering 20% of total land suitable for farming and food production.

Lord de Ramsey ended with a plea for immediate action and long-term planning for this nation.