



Representing Drainage Water Level & Flood Risk Management Authorities

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Rebecca Pow MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State,
Defra – Seacole Building
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2 April 2020

The Strategic Importance of River Management and Maintenance for Food Supply post COVID19

Dear Under Secretary,

In these unprecedented times for us all, I am fully aware of and support Defra's keen interest in ensuring that food supplies remain of strategic importance as we all try to bring the COVID19 outbreak under control.

Despite the current crisis, we at least know that at some point, the worst will pass and normality will gradually return. Clearly, many of us are focussing on the "here-and-now" and I hope you will allow me to cast my thoughts forward to the autumn and winter period 2020. I strongly advocate the need for some of us to plan ahead and take actions in the coming months to minimise the risks of flooding when people, businesses and the environment will be least able to cope with it in the immediate aftermath of the COVID19 situation.

To that end, I would welcome Defra's support in ensuring that river maintenance and management is seen as a strategically important activity in the coming spring and summer months when the majority of work is done ahead of the next winter season. Neglecting this work could have serious consequences, not only for our agricultural sector but also for more vulnerable people, communities and businesses. Reduced maintenance and management may also seriously hamper the recovery of various areas which experienced considerable suffering to people, business disruption and environmental harm as a result of the recent winter floods.

The Environment Agency has sensibly issued operational guidelines to its staff, which we have shared with IDBs so that we all operate on a common and shared understanding. ADA considers that the maintenance and management of our watercourses falls into the category of "Strategically Important Assets" as defined in those operational guidelines. I very much hope that, in the light of the warnings from the Chiefs of the World Health Organisation, World Trade Organisation and United Nations, Defra will support us in ensuring that the basics of our excellent water management system continue to be prioritised for the combined benefits I mentioned above, with full awareness of the future potential risks we face if we do not.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Caudwell
Chairman

Cc: D Cooper, H Durant, E Howard-Boyd (EA), S Roberts (NFU), N Parish MP (EFRA)

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