

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2019 REPORT

The 82nd Annual Conference and AGM of the Association of Drainage Authorities was held on 13 November at One Great George Street in Westminster, London. This report presents an extended summary of the Conference proceedings. The report includes Association business, reports from the Board, Committees and Chief Executive, keynote presentations, and a summary of the open discussion forum.

WELCOME BY ROBERT CAUDWELL

Robert opened the Conference by inviting delegates to join with him in thanking all of the operational staff of ADA's members, as well as those of the emergency services and military, who had all been involved in tackling ongoing flood events across the country during 2019. Robert welcomed over 170 delegates to the Conference, including a number of students from the Flood and Coastal Engineering programme at Brunel University, who he highlighted were the future of our industry. Robert drew attention to the messages ADA was raising with candidates and political parties during the General Election 2019 in relation to flood and water management, which had been shared with delegates.

Robert introduced our first guest speaker by noting that flood risk and land drainage, and water resources and drought management were very much two sides of the same coin, and that we needed to start managing water in the UK in an increasingly integrated manner. Robert called for a better balance in flood risk management investment, looking at the whole catchment and the wider benefits that the conveyance of water provides as well as the number of houses better defended.

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

Given that the Conference and AGM

unusually fell within a general election period, some short notice rescheduling of presentations was required. We were especially grateful to all our speakers under the circumstances. Unfortunately parliamentary candidates and Government officials were unable to participate. Invited speakers: ADA Vice President, Neil Parish MP, Chair; House of Commons, Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Committee; and Julie Foley, Director of Flood Risk Strategy & National Adaptation, Environment Agency; gave their apologies.

STUART ROBERTS, VICE PRESIDENT, NATIONAL FARMERS' UNION

Stuart Roberts was our opening keynote speaker, presenting passionately about the vital importance of good water management for the UK agricultural sector. He emphasised how government thinking needs to change to embrace the true value and significance of the rural sector within Britain's economy.

He said that Britain's farming industry is one of the best and most sustainable in the world, and illustrated various examples of widespread questionable practice overseas. Stuart was clear that "we need to be bolder, more innovative and braver."

He wanted us to be "embracing our engineering skills" and challenged that history

had shown us some really significant advances in water management, including Cornelius Vermuyden's radical drainage of England's lowlands and the development of pump and sluice technology as part of the industrial revolution. But he went on to say that we have stood still for the last century and now is the time to take the next bold step in terms of our policy, strategy and delivery.

The Water-Energy nexus is, he suggested, the next opportunity where we should consider how to follow the courageous call by Emma Howard-Boyd (Chair, Environment Agency) to aim for carbon neutrality in the Environment Agency by 2030. Stuart said that the NFU are promoting 2040 for carbon neutrality for the agricultural sector and he challenged IDBs to do the same.

The key, he said, was that water and land managers must see themselves as part of any solution, and we must all work together to achieve that, with strong support and leadership from Government. We have a collective responsibility to lay the foundations for truly integrated water management for our next generation and in the meantime act now to significantly improve how we properly maintain and manage our rivers to evacuate water in flooding and to retain/transfer water in times of drought.

John Duggleby (Beverley & North Holderness IDB) commented on breaches to embanked main river in the River Hull catchment that highlighted the need for Government support and investment, especially down the eastern seaboard and to work with IDBs in partnership.

John was sorry to say he was losing faith in the Environment Agency's commitment to working in partnership locally and concerned about the impact that this was having on agricultural production.

Stuart Roberts agreed that the importance of food production had been massively undervalued, given that the UK produces food to some of the highest environmental standards, some of the highest welfare standards, some of the highest food safety standards in the world and we've got the third most affordable food supply in the world. "We cannot allow people to export their consciences when it comes to food, but when it comes to the investment, when it comes to the EA and Defra and all the other points, we haven't put enough money into this issue."

Stuart went on: "You can't do maintenance on the cheap. You can't do new infrastructure on the cheap because if you do, you might get away with it for a year. You might get away with it for a couple of years, but eventually it will catch up with you."

Stuart Roberts and Robert Caudwell agreed that ADA and the NFU were both taking a strong leadership position on these issues, but that there was more that we could all do to help make the argument. That included IDBs telling local and surrounding communities what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what it is achieving. Stuart concluded "we all have got to be part of the solution."

Gillian Ivy (Danvm Drainage Commissioners) noted that the village of

Fishlake was dramatically flooded during Autumn 2019, in her Board's district. She had seen the fields of rotten potatoes and barley. Gillian asked Stuart's view of why all agricultural property does not pay for water to be moved, instead of only the low lying ones?

Stuart Roberts answered that he would expand that point beyond agriculture, "Actually every single person in this country has a vested interest in getting this right." He felt that people needed to make investments knowingly, and that as water managers we needed to be more visible about our work to get people excited about it and enable them to see the opportunities. He said: "This is not about a cost, this is an investment. This is a massive investment in a really interesting area. If we can have the most sustainable food production systems in the world, if we can have the best water management systems in the world, we have a competitive advantage over the Californians, over the Western Australians and over most other parts of the world. That is an investment that will pay dividends for future generations."

BRYAN CURTIS, CHAIR OF COASTAL CHAIRS GROUP

Bryan kindly stepped in at short notice to present to the ADA Conference and bring to members' attention the work of the Strategic Coastal Groups of England.

Bryan explained that Coastal Groups comprise all the key partners in coastal management – principally the coastal managers from maritime local authorities, ports authorities and the Environment Agency, as well as other interested

organisations, such as Natural England and English Heritage. There are seven Strategic Coastal Groups in England as prescribed by Defra in March 2008. Each of them is formed with regard to the local coastal processes (sediment cells) and River Basin Management Plans. In total they cover around 13,000km of coastline.

Coastal Groups are voluntary in nature that encourages a largely technical base of participants groups, giving them significant influence. They do not receive funding from central government but are resourced through a range of mechanisms generally involving membership contributions. Most of their work can be classified as research and development. Bryan emphasised the importance of the interface between the coast and its immediate hinterland, understanding how both are linked, and ensuring practitioners work with the natural processes in play.

Bryan described the contribution of the Coastal Groups towards the establishment of coastal monitoring programmes, and how an ever increasing amount of valuable data is input and maintained by the Channel Coastal Observatory, based at the National Oceanographic Centre in Southampton. Projected sea-level rises around the UK will need to be carefully considered when determining the future of our current sea defences. Having a detailed understanding of coastal processes will help those relying on those defences to plan ahead with the necessary adaptations and resilience.

Bryan concluded by explaining the policy approaches for Shoreline Management Plans and emphasised the need for those

to tie in with ideas promoted in River Basin Management Plans for the seaward end of catchments.

**ROBIN PRICE, MANAGING
DIRECTOR, WATER RESOURCES
EAST**

Robin talked about efforts to address the significant risks to England's future water supply, and to better manage water resources regionally across the country.

Originally initiated by water companies, Robin explained how England was now subdivided into five "Water Resource" areas. In the north and west these were focusing on the ability to supply water; and in the south and east on meeting and managing demand.

The overall aim is to provide a consistent national framework, securing future water supplies and ensure all sectors of the water management industry work together. Robin emphasised that the success of the water resources partnerships will be through the breadth of their ownership and that it must not just be left to water companies alone to resolve.

Millions of litres of freshwater are pumped to sea every day, and during one recent flood event, enough freshwater was pumped to sea that it could have filled Grafham Water. Consequently, securing future water supplies will require all partners to think differently and innovate.

Robin went on to explain the aims and principles of Water Resources East, which covers Eastern England from the Humber to the Thames. By the 2060s the region's gap in supply and demand will be close to

750 million litres per day and so planning must start now to fill that gap. WRE's strategy includes traditional water resource management work, better understanding demand, and then developing a set of multi-sector storage and supply options.

Robin embraced ADA's decision to represent IDBs in the region as a WRE Board Member. It served as an example of how WRE must represent the breadth of sectors involved, sitting alongside several local authorities, water companies, NFU, and CLA, and chaired by Henry Cator. Robin concluded by saying that "IDBs are absolutely front and centre of the strategy for Eastern England, and we look forward to working with you in the co-creation and delivery of our Regional Plan."

**ASSOCIATION BUSINESS AND
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2019**

ELECTIONS

Innes Thomson affirmed ADA's Board of Directors' continued full support for Robert Caudwell as ADA's Chair at the start of the AGM proceedings. Lord De Ramsey was unanimously re-elected as ADA's President along with ADA's Vice Presidents: Baroness McIntosh, Neil Parish MP, David Riddington OBE, Jean Venables CBE, and Henry Cator OBE. Additionally, John Grogan was elected as a Vice-President. These persons were proposed by Tim Farr (Trent Valley IDB) and seconded by Trevor Purllant (Welland & Deepings IDB).

DIRECTORS

The Directors, as set out in the Conference Handbook, were acknowledged at the Conference.

ACCOUNTS

The Company's Audited Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2018 were presented to the Conference as reported in the Conference Handbook.

AMENDMENT TO THE MEMORANDUM & ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

Company Secretary, Peter Bateson introduced the amendment, as proposed by ADA's Board of Directors, to be approved. This was to achieve better value for money in ADA's audit provision by replacing ADA's external auditor with an internal auditor and a reporting accountant. The reason being that an internal auditor will be able to direct comments and do work that the directors want to see in order to give assurance to ADA's Board that governance and risk and internal controls are being followed, rather than just the statement that they agree with the historic point in time. The changes also make the appointment of a reporting accountant to make sure that ADA's accounts comply with generally accepted accounting principles.

These changes were proposed by Trevor Purlant (Welland & Deepings IDB) and seconded by David Hickman (Lincolnshire County Council) by Special Resolution to the AGM, which resolved that the existing Articles of Association of the company be modified as follows:

ARTICLE 15(B)

'to receive the audited accounts of the Company made up to the end of the preceding financial period, being such period as may from time to time be determined by the Directors;'

And replaced with:

'to receive the approved accounts of the Company made up to the end of the preceding financial period, being such period as may from time to time be determined by the Directors;'

ARTICLE 15(E)

'to appoint an auditor to audit the accounts of the Company and to certify the Financial

Statement to be submitted to the annual general meeting. The auditor shall hold office upon such terms as the Directors shall from time to time determine;'

And replaced with:

'to appoint an internal auditor to report on the adequacy of the Company's governance, risk and control procedures, and to engage an external accountant to assist with the compliant preparation of the Financial Statements to be submitted to the annual general meeting. Both the internal auditor and external accountant shall hold office upon such terms as the Directors shall from time to time determine;'

AUDIT

The auditors Streets Audit LLP were reappointed as auditors of ADA's 2019 accounts as proposed by Charles Pudge (River Lugg IDB) and seconded by Tim Farr (Trent Valley IDB).

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The subscription fees for 2020, as approved by ADA Board of Directors, were presented to the Conference as reported in the

Conference Handbook. These represented an increase of 2% over ADA Members' subscription fees in 2019.

MEMBERSHIP

ADA's membership in 2019 was reported in the Conference Handbook as 106 IDBs, 5 national agencies, 1 water company, 6 Welsh internal drainage district advisory groups, 12 RFCCs, 22 Local Authorities, and 65 Associate Members.

REPORTS FROM ADA'S CHIEF

EXECUTIVE, BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND STANDING COMMITTEES

The 2019 reports from ADA's Chief Executive, Board of Directors, Policy & Finance Committee, and Technical & Environmental Committee were tabled in the Conference Handbook.

AGM MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Doug McMurdo (Bedfordshire & River Ivel IDB) wished that ADA had communicated earlier and more clearly about East Anglian IDBs' financial contribution to Water Resources East through ADA. Particular timing of the request had made it difficult for some IDBs' to get approval on the contribution. Doug urged WRE to reach out to the Bedford Group of IDBs, particularly to discuss the Bedford to Milton Keynes waterway and the aspirations of the local authorities and partners involved.

Robert Caudwell was certain that WRE would want to hold that discussion and that ADA would be happy to facilitate it. Furthermore, Innes Thomson emphasised that if IDBs needed a little bit more time to come to an informed decision regarding the WRE contribution then this would not be a problem.

OPEN DISCUSSION FORUM

Following the AGM there was an open forum to enable members to raise questions and discuss relevant topics regarding the flood and water management sector with speakers and other experts in attendance. Robert Caudwell was joined by panel members: Sarah Hendry (Director General, CLA), Ian Moodie (Technical Manager, ADA) and Catherine Nankumba (Flood & Coast Engineering Student, Brunel University London).

David Thomas (Middle Level Commissioners) opened the discussion with a question about setting a national target for flood resilience, which was well received. The response centred on clearly defining what we meant by resilience, ensuring that it finds the right balance between properly understanding what could be expected from the state, and what individuals' responsibilities were.

John Duckitt (Danvm Drainage Commissioners), Charles Pudge (River Lugg IDB) and Tony Bradford (Parrett IDB) all captured the raw concerns of many in the room, asking about steps to restore the carrying capacity of our main rivers to effectively deal with the volume of flood water. All three were increasingly concerned about the apparent reluctance to spend the money required to improve water conveyance in our main rivers. They cited over-burdensome processes that used up considerable time and money. The Panel extended their sympathy to everyone affected by the recent flooding. They felt that the answer lay in utilising a combination of relevant solutions, dependent on each catchment's geographical characteristics

from slow the flow initiatives upstream to properly funded management and maintenance of conveyance and flood defence embankments and assets in lowland areas.

Victoria Aitken (Ouse & Humber Drainage Board), Thomas Foster (Brunel University London), and Charles Pudge (River Lugg IDB) all posed challenges around the current planning system and the permitting of un-resilient development in areas prone to flooding. The Panel responded by effectively saying that with dwindling resources, Local Authorities were increasingly struggling to deal with planning issues and that greater collaboration between the EA, IDBs and local authorities was necessary to reduce inappropriate or badly conceived development. Work is also required to revise the Building Regulations to ensure greater property flood resilience.

Peter Burton (Bluntisham IDB) asked whether the many excavated gravel and clay pits could be better utilised for water storage to alleviate flood risk on embanked systems and retain water as a resource. Robin Price (WRE) explained that discussions were ongoing with gravel extractors about the future use of gravel pits for water storage in the Anglian region. The Panel considered that there should be the opportunity to develop more planned flood storage/attenuation areas and a change in policy to recognise land managers' contribution where they are willing to provide flood attenuation. It would be vital that any attenuated flood waters could be quickly and efficiently evacuated from land post-event.

Baroness McIntosh enquired about the outcome of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) trials and asked about how storage of water on farmland might be affected by the Reservoirs Act. The Panel thought that as ELMS develops it must broaden the range of public benefits for which land managers could receive payments. Concerning the Reservoirs Act, the proposed introduction of a lower threshold of 10,000m³ for bodies of water to fall under the Act had not been progressed to date by Government, but this could have implications for flood alleviation storage areas.

Vanessa McPake (Buckingham & River Ouzel IDB) raised a concern that Government departments were still not working closely enough with each other, especially on matters of surface water drainage. The Panel agreed that much more should be done to join up thinking across Government, but that local action through collaboration was equally important. Andrew Leadbetter, representing the Association of SuDS Authorities (ASA), said that there remained a need to implement more robust government policy on sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) in England, insisting that any permitted developments must take full account and responsibility for providing long-life SuDS.

Rounding up, Catherine Nankumba asked for more interaction and inclusion of younger people in matters of water management. Ian Moodie wanted to see ADA and members positively utilise the political force that flood events had received within the general election campaign to achieve real change for the management of our catchments,

and Sarah Hendry strongly advised that we all need to do more to inform the public about the importance of water and how we manage too much or too little of it.

CHAIRMAN'S AWARD 2019

Robert thanked the panellists, speakers and delegates for contributing to the Conference, and concluded proceedings by awarding ADA's Chairman's Award for 2019 to Peter Bateson (Witham Fourth District IDB) for his exceptional work in bringing together partners to deliver the Wrangle Sea Banks Improvement Project.