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PRESENTATION

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Chair, Environment Agency

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Environment Agency

Association of Drainage Authorities Flood and Water Conference 2023

21 November 2023

Flooding

Maintenance

Capital

Demaining

Floods and coastal erosion: ever-present risks

- Spend £2.6bn in 2015-21, better protection of 314,000 properties
- Spend £5.2bn in 2021-27, targeting 200,000 properties
- Strong preference for Natural Flood Management and nature-based solutions
- Between April 2021 and March 2023 we better protected around 148,000 hectares of Grade 1, 2 and 3 agricultural land from flooding.

Reasonable success on Storm Babet and Storm Ciarán

- More than 750 warnings and alerts issued across England, including 5 severe warnings
- Flood Warning Service and Floodline recorded their busiest day ever
- 168 rivers saw record levels
- 2,300 properties flooded; 139,000 properties better protected



EA incident room in Leeds



River Looe, Cornwall

Maintenance

- NIC report recommendation – ‘Government should commit to a long-term stable programme of investment in flood risk management over the next 30 years’:
 - Develop strategies on whole life cost
 - Develop adaptive pathways – adjusting to climate trajectories
- EA regularly seeks further maintenance funding from HM Treasury
- EA secured extra £25 million for maintenance this financial year
- Unlike IDBs, the EA does not carry out works for land drainage purposes

Maintenance

Condition of river embankments:

- EA maintains 7,400km of embankments; around 13,400 in total
- EA has allocated around £30 million per year to embankment maintenance (30% of total maintenance budget) for last 6 years
- 1300 embankments 'Below Required Condition'; but does not necessarily mean they are structurally unsafe or ineffective

Maintenance

Conveyance capacity of lowland main rivers:

- In 2022/23 the EA spent >£200 million maintaining flood risk assets
- Dredging: each location carefully considered to ensure a lasting difference to reducing flood risk will be made
- In most main rivers, draining and desilting not the most efficient or sustainable methods and can actually increase flood risk downstream

Maintenance

Water level incident management planning and action:

- At certain dates in some low-lying catchments, the EA manages different water levels for summer and winter (lower in winter, higher in summer)
- Winter levels have been in effect since 1 November
- EA is reviewing current summer/winter handover as part of the flood recovery learning from Storm Babet.

Capital

- Project prioritisation for funding – constantly under review
- Less projects deemed affordable due to delays (pandemic) and inflation
- 10% of deferred projects totalling 20% of the programme value are IDB schemes

Capital

- Environment Agency understands this is of concern to IDB partners; we are exploring ways in for creating more capacity for priority schemes to go ahead
- The refreshed programme is subject to approval by RFCCs and will be confirmed at the RFCC January meetings round.

Demaining

- Complex process; legislative requirements, Statutory Main River guidance and other factors to consider
- Successful pilot programmes in Kent and Lincolnshire: rationalising the Main River network (RMRN) project
- First opportunity to trial and develop a full demaining process following SoS guidance on the designation of main rivers

Demaining – impact of EA21

- Progression of legislation from the Environment Act 21 will form the statutory instrument that updates the method for rating the value of agricultural land and buildings
- This in turn will allow the creation of new IDBs and the expansion of existing IDBs beyond their existing IDD
- Demaining is intrinsically linked to these processes if the proposed demaining is outside the existing IDD
- Must recognise that it is politically, reputationally and environmentally contentious

Peatlands and peat soils

- An important water sensitive component of many catchments with a role in flood risk management, water quality, water resource, biodiversity and agriculture
- We expect any remaining application to demonstrate how it would maintain and enhance peatlands
- Consideration needed: move towards wetter farming and wise management of peat soils through water management rather than drainage



Public sector co-operation agreements

- 33 in operation: providing a really useful delivery mechanism.
- Support future use
- Make the best use of our combined resources

Conclusion

- Link between EA and ADA is vital
- Happy to commit, within limited resources, to continue close co-operation
- Lots of challenges ahead; but also plenty of opportunities