

Despite its modest size, ADA continues to punch above its weight in 2025, delivering significant benefits to its members across the flood and water management sector. Below are some of the highlights from the year:

Future of ADA

ADA's Board of Directors has approved a new three-year Business Plan to further develop the Association through to 2029. It sets ADA the purpose to shape the future of water level management, connecting land, water, and people who manage water, to deliver climate resilience, sustainable natural value, and better places. Directors have called on ADA to work with ASA towards establishing a new broader and inclusive association for 'Flood & Water Authorities'.

IDB Storm Recovery & Asset Improvement Fund

ADA has worked closely with Defra, EA, and IDBs to support the delivery of these important asset repair and climate resilience projects, showcasing IDBs' ingenuity, pace, and local knowledge. Over 200,000 hectares have already benefitted, with 279 projects funded across 94 IDBs and £52.6 million issued to date. Works have included: 6km of bank stabilisation, extended asset life in 66% of projects, 32 mobile pumps boosting resilience, telemetry upgrades to facilitate remote operation, and tilting weirs for more dynamic control of water levels. After successfully lobbying for extending the government fund into 2025/26, funding was increased by £16 million to £91 million. ADA continues to make the case for the value for money and multiple benefits the fund has delivered.

Good Governance Guide 2nd Edition

Supported by ADA members Wilkin Chapman Rollits LLC and financed by SAAA, ADA has published an updated version of the 2018 Good Governance Guide for IDBs, an authoritative and comprehensive guide to the role and functions of IDBs as democratic water managers serving their local community, economy, and landscape.

Flood Funding Reform

In July, ADA responded to Defra's proposed approach to funding and prioritising new flood and coastal erosion projects. Overall, the changes simplify the approach to funding and take account of the growing pressure on replacing and refurbishing existing assets and systems. However, ADA members remained frustrated that more fundamental aspects of flood funding were not addressed, related to the revenue maintenance of assets and systems, and how we value and proportion the benefits of schemes within areas with multiple sources of flood risk. Furthermore, future floods investment needs to create climate resilient communities and landscapes, and optimise assets to safely retain water within the landscape.

Lowland Peat

ADA continued to provide subject expertise and administrative support for Defra's Lowland Agricultural Peat Small Infrastructure Pilots during 2025. Twenty LAPSIP projects have successfully delivered infrastructure to retain higher water levels safely across over 25,000 hectares of peat soils in lowland England, facilitating the reduction of carbon emissions. The £3.8 million of funding has been invested in over 50 structures installed by IDBs and their suppliers, enabling the more dynamic control of water levels, as well as over 100 water levels sensors to monitor and automate the operation of those assets and systems in remote areas.

Environment Day

On 05 February, ADA's third annual Environment Day, sponsored by Xylem, provided an insightful day of talks related to the management of the lowland watercourses and the freshwater environment. To a capacity audience at Park Farm, Thorney, informative speakers presented to members on: LAPSIP, climate change risk and the aquatic flora of the Fens, river restoration, American mink, and beavers.

Electricity Charges

ADA has continued to monitor the cost pressures imposed by rocketing electricity standing charges on pumping station operators. Reforms by Ofgem to the method that the cost of managing and maintaining the electricity network are funded have resulted in exorbitant standing charges for customers with low annual consumption, but high-capacity requirements. Disappointingly, a change proposal to alleviate this issue was rejected by the DCUSA, and ADA has been gathering data from IDBs to lobby DESNZ ministers and constituency MPs.

IDB Funding

ADA has continued to monitor increasing drainage rates and special levies resulting from substantial inflationary cost pressures on IDBs, sharing data with Defra and MHCLG. ADA has actively contributed to the discussions of the LGA's Special Interest Group seeking to address the financial pressures of special levies on local councils. ADA's involvement has served to enhance relations with local councils and improve the understanding of IDBs' work. ADA has worked closely with Defra to form the scope of the joint study being undertaken with MHCLG to review IDBs' funding model and operational costs. ADA has secured a seat on the study's senior advisory panel to guide and monitor its progress and assist the appointed consultants' understanding of IDBs.

In Parliament

ADA has had increasing contact with MPs during 2025, supporting a growing interest amongst MPs in sustainable flood and drought management. ADA appeared before the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee on 19 May having submitted detailed evidence on behalf of members to the Committee's flood resilience in England inquiry. ADA has arranged and administered six APPG meetings for parliamentarians in 2025 in partnership with CIWEM, as well as attending other parliamentary events. Subjects have included: the operational costs for IDBs and Local Authorities, resilient infrastructure needs, enabling water smart homes, rainwater harvesting, SuDS, and the importance of soils and land management.

Flood & Coast

ADA was a strategic partner in this year's Flood & Coast Conference held in Telford in June. As well as hosting a joint stand with ASA, and a plenary session with local MPs, ADA officers chaired workshops and twice presented on rural flood resilience and lowland peat. Both associations appreciated interest shown in their members' work, and the opportunities to meet a wide range of technical specialists and strategic industry leaders.



IDB Governance

ADA is supporting the Middle Level Commissioners and Ely Group of IDBs in their studies investigating future IDB amalgamations. ADA would encourage IDBs to consider similar steps soon with adjacent boards, to ensure continued effective local governance of water level management in light of anticipated local government reorganisation.

New Recruits

ADA has successfully appointed Michael Sly as Deputy Chair through a competitive application process. Michael, a Fen farmer, Chair of North Level District IDB, and former Chair of NFU Sugar, will succeed Robert Caudwell as ADA Chair when he stands down in Autumn 2026. ADA has also appointed two influential new Vice Presidents, Peter Glas and Lee Pitcher MP. Peter, a former Dijkgraaf and Delta Commissioner, will provide interesting connection to water management in the Netherlands, and Lee, who previously worked in the water management sector, provides an important connection into Parliament.

Floods Resilience Taskforce

ADA is actively contributing to the Government's Taskforce that brings together experts and decision makers from across UK government and non-government organisations. The quarterly meetings are chaired by the Minister for Floods & Water, and ADA has been able to press for dialogue around river maintenance, with discussions anticipated at the next meeting.

Ministerial engagements

Several opportunities have arisen for contact with Defra ministers during 2025. ADA was instrumental in arranging a visit by Minister for Floods & Water, Emma Hardy MP, to the Witham & Humber Drainage Boards in October. The meeting provided the opportunity to discuss a variety of issues of concern as well as showcasing the successful delivery of Defra funded IDB projects.

Better Environmental Regulation

Following concerns regarding long delays to applications from RMAs for Flood Risk Activity Permits (FRAPs), ADA has called for a fundamental rethink of England and Wales's Environmental Permitting regulations, and suggested that Defra and the EA look closely at the regulatory approach used for water boards in the Netherlands. It utilises a Code of Conduct to provide clear rules for managing and maintaining linear lengths of watercourses and thousands of assets across an extensive lowland environment. As a result, water boards do not apply for environmental permits, exemptions, or exclusions from the regulatory authorities for all of their routine management and maintenance activities, reducing bureaucratic delay, and facilitating practices that enhance the aquatic environment.

Wales

ADA has renewed and enhanced working relations with NRW, visiting the Newport Levels and welcoming David Letellier onto ADA's Policy Committee. When conditions are right, ADA is ready to assist NRW in reviewing the future operations of internal drainage districts in Wales.

Rural Flood Resilience Partnership

ADA is an active member of the partnership (alongside the EA, NFU, CLA, NE, and ACRE), seeking to improve collaboration, deepen understanding of rural vulnerabilities, and support agricultural businesses and rural communities in building their resilience to flooding. ADA is developing the Partnership's website.

Audit Thresholds

ADA has assisted the SAAA in securing from government the legislative changes to increase the upper threshold for limited audit arrangements from £6.5 million to £15 million per financial year. ADA provided data and information from IDBs, highlighting the justification for the changes, which provide a substantial cost savings for larger IDBs.

Regional Strategies

ADA retains an influential position on the Programme Board on both Fens2100+ and Humber2100+ on behalf of members, ensuring that local IDBs have a voice in the development of both of the long term strategies development for managing future flood risk management in both of these important lowland landscapes.

Main River Maintenance

ADA is coordinating a national call for increased focus on routine main river maintenance following growing pressures on the EA to reduce, stop, or plan withdrawal of maintenance activities. This involves high-level discussions with Defra, the EA, and other strategic partners such as the NFU, CLA, ADEPT, and LGA SIG. These efforts grew in intensity following the surprise announcement by the EA of the planned permanent withdrawal of maintenance activities from stretches of main river in Somerset. ADA has supported the Somerset IDBs in challenging the EA's approach and intentions, and the need for local coordination between RMAs. ADA has also secured agreement by the EA to review and update PSCA guidelines to enhance the essence of co-operation between RMAs rather than taking an overly contractual approach.

Schools Challenge

Pupils from six secondary schools participated in the ADA sponsored Power of Water Challenge within the Lincolnshire Agricultural Society's Schools' Challenge 2025. They researched and made a model to show the different ways that water can be managed to reduce flooding and alleviate drought. It was fantastic to have so many pupils learning about water this year, and clearly the judges at the Lincolnshire Show were impressed by their effort and creativity, as Queen Elizabeth High School, Gainsborough won overall in the secondary school section with University Academy Holbeach coming second. Well done to all the pupils involved.