



Representing Drainage  
Water Level & Flood Risk  
Management Authorities

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## **ADA calls for urgent flood risk management policy change towards a much greater focus on everyday maintenance and management of our river systems**

Storm Babet brought us a spell of weather which yet again broke records. For many years, ADA has been arguing that making the correct levels of investment in the maintenance and operation of our flood risk assets is essential and currently shows to be good value for money at every £1 spent providing a return of £11. Investment on new-build flood defences is estimated to only be providing a £5 return for every £1 spent on them.

As Storm Babet has further exposed the weakness in the UK's policy and strategy towards a number of issues, ADA wants to see urgent Government action to change policies and put in place costed plans for the repair and remediation for all flood risk assets, and their long-term maintenance.

Commenting on the current situation, Robert Caudwell, ADA's Chair said " *Yes, we are seeing exceptional levels of rainfall hitting our shores, but we are moving backwards in taking the necessary steps to adapt and become more resilient to these events. Flooding badly affects people, businesses and the environment with wide knock-on effects and successive governments have ignored calls to get the basics right in properly funding everyday management and maintenance of our river systems* " He went on to add " *We need urgent action to change policies towards favouring routine maintenance so that all the flood risk systems we already have are in the best condition they can be.*"

ADA has written to the Secretary of State at Defra to highlight their concerns as follows;

### **The Condition of River Embankments**

ADA is seriously concerned with the condition of the many lowland embankments of our main rivers in England. There are multiple cases of embankments having slumped, seeping during high flows, and in some cases having completely breached during or in the aftermath of Storm Babet. Overtopping of water in severe storms can be expected and generally dealt with, but embankment failures cause costly, resource-intensive, wide-ranging issues for local communities, businesses and the environment.

One week on, hundreds of homes and businesses along with thousands of acres of top quality food-producing farmland and environmentally sensitive areas remain underwater or badly damaged in various parts of the country.

ADA – representing drainage, water level and flood risk management authorities

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## Conveyance Capacity of Lowland Main Rivers

With no long-term plan for the maintenance of our lowland main rivers, many have seen their conveyance capacity reduce well below their intended, original design standard. The banks of several crucial flood drainage sections of main rivers have significantly encroached into the channel, and allowed aquatic vegetation to take root, with many examples of unmanaged trees and shrubs growing mid-channel in critical locations.

Robert Caudwell commented that “ *Because of Government policy limiting work on certain sections of river, such constrictions within these critical engineered lowland rivers have been allowed to develop and this is putting increased pressure on associated lowland flood and water management assets by increasing the prevalence, duration, and damage potential of overtopping events along embanked main rivers.* ”

## Recovery Support funding for Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs)

IDBs routinely deal with and are well prepared for the effects of storms and controlled excesses of water by pumping to help keep communities, land and environmental sites safe. What is not covered or expected by IDBs is the level of inundation caused by main river embankment failures and overtopping caused by lack of conveyance capacity, and the significant pumping costs incurred as a result of under-investment in maintenance which is outwith their control. This type of uncontrolled flooding has also caused damage to IDB watercourses, water control assets and pumping stations.

Internal Drainage Boards are the only Risk Management Authorities without an agreed mechanism for emergency financial assistance from Government and ADA has repeatedly called on Government over several previous flooding events that emergency financial assistance must be made available to IDBs involved in, responding to, and recovery from serious flood events. ADA also strongly believes that IDBs should be recompensed for costs where the water flowing into their districts has been caused by failed main river assets.

Commenting on this issue, Innes Thomson, ADA’s CEO, said “*Such support funding is needed to ensure that undue costs are not passed on to rate payers and special levy paying local councils, nor erode the financial reserves of IDBs that are retained for the refurbishment and replacement of critical FCERM assets and plant over the longer term* ”

## Water level incident management planning and action

ADA has raised the issue of using the incident management process to lower water levels in critical watercourses to increase their capacity for handling storm water. In some cases, this does successfully take place but we need to address the unnecessary barriers which are preventing this happening more widescale. Innes Thomson said “ *In the face of flood alerts and warnings, the control of river levels must take precedence to minimise the impacts of flooding to people, businesses and the environment. ADA is therefore asking that this situation is reviewed nationally as a matter of urgency as part of the EA’s flood risk incident management planning*” **ENDS**



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## Notes to Editors

### ADA

ADA is the membership organisation for those involved in drainage, water level and flood risk management. Its members include Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), the Environment Agency, Regional Flood Defence Committees, Local Authorities, Natural Resources Wales, the Northern Ireland Rivers Agency, Consultants, Contractors and Suppliers.

ADA is involved in a wide range of work for and on behalf of its members helping to exchange ideas towards solving common problems and finding new, better ways of working. ADA responds to consultations from the Government, either on behalf of members or assisting with individual member responses. It represents all interests nationally and locally in relation to drainage, water level and flood risk management, for example, in relation to legislation and public inquiries. ADA acts together with other organisations to pursue the Association's objectives, including linking to Europe through ADA's membership of EUWMA, the European Union of Water Management Associations.

ADA obtains and shares information on matters of importance and interest to members, and provides advice on technical and administrative problems. ADA is supported by a volunteer network of branches which bring together members for meetings at a regional level. ADA organises exhibitions and meetings for the benefit of members, maintains a website at [www.ada.org.uk](http://www.ada.org.uk) and publishes the quarterly ADA Gazette.

ADA is a limited company with offices based at Stoneleigh Park in Warwickshire. ADA welcomes enquiries from the press and can be contacted during normal weekday office hours on 02476 992889 or by e-mail at [admin@ada.org.uk](mailto:admin@ada.org.uk).

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