



Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food,
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From the Minister for Fisheries & the Countryside
Councillor David Shakespeare Chairman
South East England Regional Assembly
Bridge House
1 Walnut Tree Close
Guildford
GU1 4GA

Your ref. P/001277/01
Our ref. 149884

~~30th~~ January 2001

Dear Cllr Shakespeare

As you know your letter of 8 January to John Prescott at the Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions about flood defence has been passed to this Department for reply as we have policy responsibility for flood defence in England.

In exercising this policy function we work closely with the flood and coastal defence operating authorities who have responsibility for delivering this service. The principal flood defence operating authority is the Environment Agency which has responsibility for flood defence on designated main rivers and exercises a general supervision over all matters relating to flood defence. The operating authorities responsible for ordinary watercourses are local authorities and, where they exist, internal drainage boards.

I am pleased that you are engaged in debate with the Environment Agency on flood defence and I read with interest the synopsis of the presentation that David Jordan gave to you in November. That said, there are a number of areas where we would take issue with Mr Jordan's assertions about Government policy and we are in touch with him direct about these.

I would like to respond in detail to the issues that you raise in your letter.

Funding and institutional arrangements

As you know we are engaged in a review of the present funding arrangements for flood and coastal defence. I accept that the arrangements are somewhat complex but, as you also acknowledge, they do have an important degree of local democratic input.

The present review is scheduled to be completed by September 2001 and consultation is under way with interested parties, including local authorities; we are ready to receive any further comments from the regional assembly. The issue of block grant for the Environment Agency's capital programme is being considered as part of the funding review.

In terms of the quantum of investment, the following table shows the rapidly increasing profile of Government spending on flood and coastal defence in recent and future years:

Total Government spending on flood and coastal defence (£ Million)			
Year	MAFF Grant and other expenditure	DETR funding delivered through Revenue Support Grant	Total
1990/01	54.4	167.0	221.4
1991/92	72.5	197.1	269.6
1992/93	65.3	214.4	279.7
1993/94	65.3	211.7	277.0
1994/95	73.6	200.4	274.0
1995/96	94.9	177.4	272.3
1996/97	102.6	207.1	309.7
1997/98	87.2	225.4	312.6
1998/99	78.3	239.8	318.1
1999/00	75.7	252.0	327.7
2000/01 – budget	82.7	257.1	339.8
2001/02 – forecast	108.3*	268.2	376.5
2002/03 – forecast	111.7	279.7	391.4
2003/04 – forecast	119.7	291.7	411.7

* Including additional funding for emergency response and emergency repairs.

David Jordan also referred to the present institutional arrangements for flood and coastal defence. While the Government has not been persuaded in the past that changes should be made to these arrangements, we do not have a closed mind and would be willing to consider whether any changes would be beneficial following the funding review referred to above. This would include consideration of the current two tiers of flood defence committees which exist in some regions, including EA's Southern Region.

Development control

As regards development in the flood plain, last year the Government consulted on strengthened guidance to local planning authorities, in the form of PPG25, which would replace the current Circular 30/92. In the light of comments on the draft PPG25, and experience of the flooding last year, this guidance is being further strengthened and DETR will be consulting shortly on this.

Effects on businesses of flooding

The Government recognises the effects that the flooding has had on businesses and householders in the South East and elsewhere. While it has been the policy of successive Governments not to pay compensation to those who suffer losses, as flooding is an insurable risk, we will do what we can to assist those whose businesses have difficulty in meeting Government requirements. For example it might be possible to exercise flexibility on deadlines for VAT and tax returns where businesses have lost paperwork through flooding.

I hope that this full response is helpful.

Yours
G. A. Manley