



MIDDLE LEVEL COMMISSIONERS

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Our Ref.: 8/3h

Your Ref.:

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Reducing the threat, building resilience, empowering communities

National Strategy Consultation

This response is written on behalf of the Middle Level Commissioners and the IDBs administered from this office, a list of which is appended. We have seen the response prepared by the Association of Drainage Authorities and in general terms, agree with that response. We do, however, have the following additional comments.

It does perhaps need to be more emphasised that there is a direct correlation between surface water and watercourses. The former, if not properly regulated, can put undue stress on the latter and cause flooding, although it is recognised that steps have been taken within the Flood and Water Management Act, to address this. Equally, however, if watercourses are not maintained, flooding can back up, or prevent the discharge of surface water systems. This comment is applicable to questions 1 and 6.

Whilst there is brief mention of how flooding can be caused by a combination of factors occurring at the same time, such as surface water and rivers overtopping, the document does not explore how these combination flooding events might be investigated and addressed.

River flooding investigation is the responsibility of the Environment Agency and surface water flooding is the responsibility of the Lead Local Flood Authority, and as such this could lead to confusion over who is responsible for the initial investigation in situations where it is difficult to ascertain the initial cause of the flood risk.

In section 3.1, it will be interesting to see what are regarded as “unnecessary buildings in areas of high flood risk”. What also seems to be missing is a positive commitment, where work is proposed, to weigh up the effect on life and property of not doing work. While to a certain extent covered in the ‘do nothing’ option, this would involve a wider consideration of costs and benefits generally and against objections to the works. While the paper does incorporate it, the emphasis on local initiatives does mean that a strong catchment overview, to ensure the consistency of local schemes, is required.

In section 3.2, while LLFAs are identified, schemes promoted by IDBs or local authorities are not. The position on projects crossing a local authority boundary, also needs to be clarified. While



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there is also no objection to FCERM projects seeking to provide environmental benefits, perhaps consideration should also be given to an objective for other types of project, where relevant, to seek to provide FCERM benefits? The feature of the paper of local beneficiaries and local funding is, of course, already practised within IDBs. The importance of local knowledge should also be stressed, both here and within the paper generally.

In 3.3.1, Planning Risk Management, the statement is made that plans will set “out where risk management authorities will take action”. Questions arise about the level of detail of the plans, both here and elsewhere, and what commitments they will contain. The IDB Policy Statements

currently set out their policies on taking action. More generally, while in some areas vague, other sections suggest that the National/Local Strategies will be detailed and this should be clarified.

The reference in 3.3.2 to supporting agriculture, is welcomed.

In 3.3.3, care needs to be taken in publishing information on risks, that it is interpreted correctly and does not create alarm. In our view, this section should put the primary emphasis on maintaining existing infrastructure, rather than building new ones.

In 4.2, surely the RFCC is a committee of a risk management authority? It is also pleasing to see acceptance that RFCC’s will control the spend of the IDB Precept.

The paragraph “Reducing the risk of flooding from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses” in 4.3 needs to be partially rewritten as its present wording can convey erroneous impressions. Equally, IDBs should be included within the final paragraph of the next following sub-section, “Reducing the risk of flooding from sewers and drains”.

Despite the recent grants announcement, questions must remain about how quickly LLFA’s will gain the technical expertise to perform functions.

The idea of local community contributions, in Section 5 is, we feel, potentially a good one although it seems to have been overlooked that monies derived from local authorities and IDBs is also public money. It is felt that the implications of this have not been fully considered, despite the final paragraph of Section 5 which, except by an implied reference to special levies, is confused in relation to IDBs. In the same section, the disbenefits from ceasing maintenance, to wildlife and other beneficiaries also need to be assessed.

Our other additional comments are as follows, linked to the questions posed within the Strategy.

Question 2 The proper effect on all utilities must be evaluated. We are aware that Cambridgeshire County Council is developing, as part of its surface water management planning project, a multi criteria assessment of flood risk. The assessment will enable the Council to prioritise the risk in



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defined areas in the County. The Commissioners do, however, disagree with how the Government proposes to quantify the level of disruption caused by a road closure. The Government bases its calculation on the length of road closed. We feel that this is an irrelevant calculation; whether a road is closed for either 10 metres or 2 metres it is still closed, and causes the same level of disruption and associated risk. Particularly in rural areas the closure of key through routes has a massive impact on the local economy. We are investigating the use of traffic usage figures to prioritise the risks associated with the main traffic routes.

We also consider that more emphasis should be placed on agriculture as a business affected by flooding.

Question 4

We would seek clarification on the following aim:

‘Move the focus from providing Government funded activities towards a new approach that helps decision-making and action at the appropriate level – individual, community or authority’ and how this would actually work. While there is, in IDB areas, a recognised local based cost recovery mechanism, more clarity is required on how this would work outside such areas, particularly where political and catchment boundaries differ.

Question 7(b)

It is also not clear and clarity should be provided as to what actual measures should be included in the National and Local Strategies and to what level of detail.

Question 9

We are concerned that the strategy seems to create new duties for Lead Local Flood Authorities, over and above what has been stated in the Act and Flood Risk Regulations. It is also unclear as to what these new deliverables might be, how they might be funded and who will need to deliver against them.

Question 13

If the source of flooding is not clear, or is found to be due to a combination of factors, this may then create difficulties. Equally, public expectations will need to be managed, as the Acts applicable to flood defence/land drainage works create a framework of permissive powers not mandatory duties.



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Question 16

The role of IDBs in providing local funding from the beneficiaries of their works should not be overlooked.

We welcome the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully

Jain Smith

Clerk and Chief Executive



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APPENDIX

Benwick Internal Drainage Board
Bluntisham Internal Drainage Board
Churchfield and Plawfield Internal Drainage Board
Conington and Holme Internal Drainage Board
Curf and Wimblington Combined Internal Drainage Board
Euximoor Internal Drainage Board
Hundred Foot Washes Internal Drainage Board
Hundred of Wisbech Internal Drainage Board
Ladus District Drainage Commissioners
Manea and Welney District Drainage Commissioners
March and Whittlesey Internal Drainage Board
March East Internal Drainage Board
March Fifth District Drainage Commissioners
March Sixth District Drainage Commissioners
March Third District Drainage Commissioners
Needham Burial and Birdbeck District Drainage Commissioners
Nightlayers Internal Drainage Board
Nordelph Internal Drainage Board
Ramsey First (Hollow) Internal Drainage Board
Ramsey Fourth (Middlemoor) Internal Drainage Board
Ramsey Upwood and Great Raveley Internal Drainage Board
Ransonmoor District Drainage Commissioners
Sawtry Internal Drainage Board
Sutton and Mepal Internal Drainage Board
Swavesey Internal Drainage Board
Upwell Internal Drainage Board
Waldersey Internal Drainage Board
Warboys Somersham and Pidley Internal Drainage Board
White Fen District Drainage Commissioners