

Press release: Environment Agency Chair calls for new approach to flood and coastal resilience

- EA preparing for 4°C rise in global temperature and will develop new standards of flood resilience for communities
- All infrastructure resilient to flooding and coastal change by 2050
- £1 billion per year needed in traditional flood and coastal defences
- Climate change & population growth set to double number of properties built on flood plain over next 50 years

Launching a major, long-term strategy to tackle flooding and coastal change, Environment Agency Chair, Emma Howard Boyd has said 'we cannot win a war against water' by building higher flood defences and called for a new approach to ensure communities are resilient to the threat of flooding posed by climate change.

Opening an 8-week consultation on the new strategy, Emma Howard Boyd said that the Environment Agency is preparing for a potential 4°C rise in global temperature and urgent action is needed to tackle more frequent, intense flooding and sea level rise.

Among the recommendations in the strategy, the Environment Agency has committed to working with partners to develop consistent standards for flood and coastal resilience across the country. To achieve these standards, communities should have access to a range of tools which give them control of how they prepare for and respond to flooding and coastal change, based on the challenges or flood risk that particular location may face.

These could include traditional defences, temporary barriers, natural flood management, sustainable drainage systems, effective flood warnings and emergency response, alongside designing and adapting existing properties and new development so they can recover quickly from a flood.

Launching the strategy at Brunel University in London, Emma Howard Boyd said:

The coastline has never stayed in the same place and there have always been floods, but climate change is increasing and accelerating these threats.

We can't win a war against water by building away climate change with infinitely high flood defences. We need to develop consistent standards for flood and coastal resilience in England that help communities better understand their risk and give them more control about how to adapt and respond.

Currently, two thirds of properties in England are served by infrastructure in areas at risk of flooding and for every person who suffers flooding, around 16 more are affected by loss of services such as power, transport and telecommunications.

The strategy calls for all infrastructure to be flood resilient by 2050 and the Environment Agency has committed to working with risk management authorities and infrastructure providers to achieve this.

In addition to resilience measures, an average of £1 billion will need to be invested each year in traditional flood and coastal defences and natural flood management. The National Audit Office has previously reported that for every £1 spent on protecting communities, around £9 in property damages and wider impacts is avoided.

As well as taking precautions to prepare for flooding and prevent damage, the strategy calls for more to be done to encourage property owners to 'build back better' after a flood. This could involve home improvements to make them more resilient, such as raised electrics, hard flooring and flood doors. The Environment Agency will work with government, insurers and financial institutions to review how to bring about this change by 2025.

Over 5 million people in England are at risk from flooding and coastal erosion. Yet only a third of people who live in areas at risk of flooding believe their property is at risk. The strategy pledges to build a nation of 'climate champions' working with the school curriculum to educate young people about the risk and continuing to develop accessible digital tools to communicate flooding.

The strategy also recommends:

- As properties built in the flood plain are likely to double over the next 50 years due to population growth and climate change, between now and 2030 all new development must be resilient to flooding and coastal change.
- Flooding and coastal change projects should support local economic regeneration, unlocking potential for new housing and business.
- All new development must not only be resilient to flooding but should also contribute to an environmental net gain.
- Government, the Environment Agency and risk management authorities need to be agile to the latest climate science, growth projections, investment opportunities and other changes to our local environment.
- In some cases, the scale of flooding or coastal change may be so significant the concept of 'build back better' may not be appropriate.

This may mean potentially moving communities out of harm's way in the longer term.

The Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy consultation is due to run from 9 May 2019 for 8 weeks up until 4 July 2019. Once the consultation has closed, the Environment Agency will review the responses and publish a final document which will then be laid before Parliament in winter 2019.

This strategy forms part of the government's commitments set out in the 25 Year Environment plan to improve the environment within a generation, leaving it in a better state than we found it. Stakeholder reaction

Lord Deben, Chairman of the Committee on Climate Change, said:

Everyone can see climate change accelerating. The UK urgently needs to stay ahead of worsening impacts by adapting. The Environment Agency is doing just that by setting out their flood strategy but we won't be able to keep up with the pace of change if we don't reduce emissions to zero. The Committee on Climate Change's net zero report shows how to do that.

Sir John Armitt, Chair of the National Infrastructure Commission said:

Climate change is a real and growing threat to our way of life and nowhere is this felt more keenly than those parts of the country facing an increased risk of flooding. So we welcome the Agency's approach and their endorsement of our call for a national standard for flood resilience.

In many cases, we won't be able to stop flooding and coastal erosion. But that doesn't mean we should just accept it. We must ensure that communities are resilient and as our Assessment showed, this is affordable and achievable.

It's essential that the government's National Infrastructure Strategy, published this autumn as part of the Spending Review, adopts our recommendation and backs this up with a robust and effective plan for funding and delivery.

Speech: PM speech at Vaisakhi reception: 8 May 2019

It is fantastic to welcome you all to Downing Street for these Vaisakhi celebrations once again.

This is such a special event – coming as it does when the days are growing longer and together we can celebrate spring.

But for me, it is also an incredibly important opportunity:

To say thank you to all of you here and to Sikhs across the UK for the brilliant contribution you make to our country day in and day out.

To recognise the diverse and wide ranging roles our Sikh community plays in so many different arenas.

And to reflect together on the values this important festival represents.

Now – I have to confess – I haven't yet been to a Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan. But I have heard what fantastic events they are – with five baptised Sikhs – representing the “panj pyare” leading the procession in ceremonial dress, as the Sikh community comes together to commemorate the birth of the Khalsa.

This year we have seen fantastic processions in Southall. Gravesend. Coventry. Leeds. Nottingham. Leicester.

And of course – we can be immensely proud to be home to one of the biggest celebrations outside of India – in Birmingham.

But although I haven't yet been to one of these parades – I have been lucky enough to be a frequent guest at gudwaras in my constituency and across the UK – and can not only imagine the warm Punjabi welcome at this time of year – but just how good the food must be.

This of course is a particularly important year for the whole of the Sikh community.

2019 marks the 550th anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh guru, in 1469.

And I am sure we will see many events to celebrate this later in the year.

But 2019 also marks the centenary of an appalling event – the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar.

No one who has heard the accounts of what happened that day can fail to be deeply moved. No one can truly imagine what the visitors to those gardens went through that day one hundred years ago.

It was – as the former Prime Minister H.H. Asquith described it at the time – “one of the worst outrages in the whole of our history”.

Jallianwala Bagh is a shameful scar on British Indian history.

We deeply regret what happened and the pain inflicted on so many people.

And on the day of the centenary Sir Dominic Asquith – the current British High Commissioner and H.H. Asquith’s grandson – visited Jallianwala Bagh and laid a wreath on behalf of the whole country.

Our relationship with the Sikh Community is one we cherish greatly – with collaboration and partnership at its heart.

And I am delighted that last week a debate in Westminster Hall focused on the contribution of Sikhs to the UK – following on from the launch of Sikh History and Awareness month by Seema Malhotra MP in April.

There were some great contributions made during that debate – and it was a timely reminder of the hard work, compassion, and generosity of Sikhs in communities up and down the country and abroad.

That generosity is – of course – very much in evidence at Vaisakhi, and most particularly in the way this is such an inclusive festival with a welcoming hand extended to everyone.

So finally, let me send all Sikhs celebrating Vaisakhi my belated – but heartfelt – best wishes.

I hope you all enjoy this afternoon’s event.

Speech: Calling for peace, security and justice in Bosnia

Statement by Stephen Hickey, UK Political Coordinator the UN, at the Security Council briefing on Bosnia and Herzegovina

Speech: Calling for peace, security

and justice in Bosnia

Thank you, Mr President. Let me begin by thanking the High Representative for his very objective and detailed report and for all the efforts that he has made and his team have made to support peace and security in Bosnia. You continue to have our full support.

I'd also like to echo the tribute that you made to Lord Ashdown who played a vital role in galvanising international action during the conflicts that followed the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. We won't forget his personal contribution to the stability and security of the region.

Mr President, I think the High Representative brought out very clearly for us, in his briefing, the major challenges with regard to the rule of law, the backsliding against different commitments and also the many risks to Bosnia's future. And I think that your briefing really brought home to us the need for the Council to remain very focussed on the situation in Bosnia and also the continuing importance of your role and the role of the Office of the High Representative, which remains the final authority regarding the civilian implementation of the peace agreement. And this includes our support, the UK support, for the use of the Bonn Powers – if the situation requires – as well as continuing support for the EUFOR mission and its executive mandate. You have our full support.

Mr President, the last time we met to discuss this issue, elections had just taken place. However, seven months later, the process of government formation is still not complete. While we welcome the swift progress made in the Republika Srpska, we share the disappointment of South Africa and Cote d'Ivoire, in that it's very disappointing that the state-level Council of Ministers, the Federation entity Government and four of the ten cantonal Governments have not yet been appointed. And we also urge political leaders to engage constructively on government formation at all levels, so they can begin to implement reforms that benefit all of their citizens.

Again, when we last met, many Council members – including the United Kingdom – urged those in positions of responsibility to refrain from spreading divisive sentiments and to act in the interests of all citizens. It's again extremely disappointing that the divisive nationalist rhetoric, which dominated the election period, has persisted. As the High Representative indicated, such divisive nationalist rhetoric makes politics difficult and compromise elusive. It doesn't serve the citizens that they are elected to represent, nor does it encourage the peace and stability we've all hoped for, for so many years. It is particularly concerning that some authority figures have attempted to use their position to undermine state institutions and intimidate Bosnian citizens, such as through announced changes to the Republika Srpska Criminal Code, which again, you highlighted in your report.

We fully support the Peace Implementation Council steering board's commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's fundamental structure as a single sovereign state composed of two entities. This spread of nationalistic sentiment is

indicative of the wider political environment in which the democratic sphere is gradually being eroded. Laws on public assembly fall short of international standards across Bosnia and so recent moves to make these even more restrictive in the Republika Srpska were particularly alarming. Freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and freedom of the media are fundamental elements of a healthy functional democracy. Unnecessary and antagonistic legislative changes only serve to undermine democracy and move Bosnia further away from the international standards and democratic norms it needs to meet in order to progress.

Mr President, the United Kingdom welcomes the progress made, including the appeals judgment of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals on the case of Radovan Karadzic. This judgment is an important result for international justice, sending a powerful message that those who carry out atrocities will be held accountable for their actions and sentenced accordingly. Therefore, it's simply appalling that political leaders and sections of society continue to deny not only the judgments of the ICTY and the IRMCT, but also the genocide in Srebrenica, despite the conclusive finding of genocide by both international tribunals and national courts. It is deplorable that political actors are willing to put their political pursuits ahead of justice for victims and for peace for all.

We also commend the submission of the answers to the follow-up questions to the European Commission questionnaire. And we welcome the public commitment of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina's European path as declared in a joint statement in December. Bosnia must now demonstrate its commitment to European-Atlantic integration, including to the rule of law, democracy and human rights. To ensure this is successful, the implementation of difficult but essential reforms are necessary. As are efforts on socio-economic reforms, which provide more opportunities for the citizens of Bosnia and therefore help to stem the flow of people leaving in search of a more prosperous and stable future elsewhere.

Mr President, although there has been some progress, as I've just mentioned, towards long term peace and prosperity for Bosnia, there is clearly still a very long way to go. I think, therefore, it would be useful for this Council to hear further from the High Representative about what more could we do and what more could the international community do to enhance the rule of law in Bosnia and to encourage reconciliation? We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you very much.

Speech: Jeremy Hunt's opening remarks

at press conference with Mike Pompeo

The Foreign Secretary was speaking in London on 8 May alongside the US Secretary of State.