



Old Snuff Mill Warehouse
Park Lane
Bewdley
Worcestershire
DY12 2EL

Tel: 01299 403055
Fax: 01299 403101
e-mail: mail@floodforum.org.uk
www.floodforum.org.uk

National Flood Forum
A Manifesto for Flood Victims
Extended Version

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National Flood Forum

A Manifesto for Flood Victims - Further Information

- *This document expands on the thinking behind the short form of the Manifesto and develops the Action Points we believe need to be taken on board by government, the Environment Agency and Local Authorities.*

1. What we want to see from the next Government

- *Early implementation of the Floods and Water Management Bill*

The National Flood Forum has taken a great interest in both this Bill and the draft that preceded it. We contributed to the early thinking and made a detailed response to last year's Draft. [Click here to read](#)

We welcome the current Bill and hope that it will become law before the general election. However, it seems likely that key provisions may be subject to Commencement Orders, i.e. will not be implemented until a Ministerial Order is published.

This would risk turning hope into despair for the flood victims and communities that look to government for help.

We call on all Parties to pledge that they will enact the Bill without delay and will implement it in full during 2010-11.

- *A comprehensive Flooding Bill within two years*

We recognize that it was necessary to trim the Draft Bill to get it through Parliament before the election. We want the next government to commit to the goal set down in the Pitt Review, that flooding legislation should be updated and streamlined under a single unifying Act, consolidating previous legislation and taking forward the issues dropped from the draft Bill.

A particular issue that affects many landowners is flooding caused by the actions or inaction of neighbours. At present, they can only seek redress through the civil courts, at their own expense.

We call on all Parties to pledge to make causing flooding to others a Statutory Nuisance within the realm of Environmental Health legislation.

- *Give the EA a Duty to address flooding, not simply a Power*

We cannot understand why the Environment Agency should only have a Power to carry out Flood Risk Management works and not a Duty. This contrasts with the Duty to promote the Conservation of Flora and Fauna and Fisheries. When a conflict arises, the Conservation Duty takes precedence over the Flooding Power. Householders often perceive this as “they want to protect the furry creatures rather than keeping my house dry”. We have seen, and our flood groups have reported, numbers of cases where the Conservation Duty has delayed or inhibited flood relief schemes.

In circumstances where there is a conflict between flood risk and conservation, we believe that protecting houses should take precedence. Having a Duty to address Flooding would not remove other Duties, but it would ensure that people are given at least the same priority as Flora and Fauna and Fisheries.

We call on all Parties to pledge to redress the balance to favour flood victims and communities

- *Putting continuing care for Flood Victims at the centre of flood recovery*

Flooding is arguably the most traumatic event that can afflict a family short of death. When the Minister and the media have gone, families face 12 months or more of disruption, loss, anxiety and ill-health until their houses are repaired. But the impact can continue for years, with extra insurance costs, worry that flooding will happen again and the possibility that the house is unsellable due to flood risk.

Flood victims need continuing support for as long as it takes.

We call on all Parties to pledge to develop a national framework for outreach support to Flood Victims, with delivery co-ordinated by the Lead Local Flood Authority

- *A One-Stop Shop and community support centre in emergencies*

The Pitt Review noted how people were often passed from pillar to post between public bodies during the 2007 floods. We are frequently told that people have to make up to '17 telephone calls' trying to get assistance, as the response is often 'it's not our water it's his'. When an emergency is happening, people need someone who will take ownership of the incident, give clear, concise information, support and get assistance out if appropriate.

We want to see one body taking responsibility for dealing with the public during a flood event, operating as a One Stop Shop for flood information, advice and action.

We call on all Parties to state how they will make this happen throughout the country.

- *Clarify lines of responsibility*

Flood Risk management is split between many bodies – DEFRA, the EA, County, Unitary and District Councils, Internal Drainage Boards and others. The Floods and Water Management Bill lays down a framework for managing local flood risk, but does not specify a structure for this. There is great opportunity for confusion at the interface between main river issues (dealt with by the EA) and surface water flooding (dealt with by Local Authorities). Flood victims need to know who will give them answers – and those answers need to be in a form that suits them. Not everyone has access to the internet!

We call on all Parties to pledge to involve flood victims, flood groups and the National Flood Forum in setting up new arrangements under the Floods and Water Management Bill.

- *Commitment to real-terms increases in capital funding going forward*

The number of households at serious risk of flooding grows almost daily, yet there is no certain funding for capital works beyond 2011. The Environment Agency has estimated that annual expenditure for capital works will need to grow from £570M in 2010/11 to £1040M by 2035, to maintain current protection levels. Surface water flooding will require further expenditure

We call on all Parties to pledge capital and revenue funding for fluvial and pluvial flood risk management to maintain at least current protection levels (taking account of climate change).

- *Continued grants for property based flood measures*

Community flood protection schemes are the ideal, but are not cost-effective in many cases. Surface water flooding is extremely difficult to predict and to defend against.

Many communities have little hope of a capital scheme, even years in the future. And flooding is not discerning, it hits both rich and poor.

Since 2007, government has allocated £5M to local authorities to promote property-level flood resistance and resilience measures. These grants must continue.

We call on all Parties to pledge to set up a permanent scheme of property level grants for flood resistance and resilience measures

- *A Public Commission to investigate the Flood Insurance industry*

Flood Insurance is riven with anomalies and inconsistencies. Different companies can charge wildly different premiums for similar properties and impose unaffordable Excess amounts. Even identical houses flooded to the same extent and insured by the same company can have totally different premiums and Excess amounts. When a property has been flooded, the Free Market in insurance no longer works effectively and householders may find themselves facing a one-company monopoly. And people who have invested heavily in flood protection products and flood resilience still face large excess amounts.

We receive regular calls from householders who are effectively trapped in their property because potential purchasers cannot get flood insurance. This is despite the Flooding “Statement of Principles” between the ABI and Government which aims to ensure that a new owner will be able to secure flood insurance.

We call on all Parties to pledge to hold a Public Commission on Flood Insurance and make recommendations to ensure fair treatment for flood victims.

2. What we want to see from the Environment Agency

- *Work with communities and put them at the heart of every flood scheme*

The National Flood Forum believes that the Environment Agency shows the best and arguably the worst features of a large organization. It has highly committed, local experts delivering a first class, community-focused service in some areas, while in others it demonstrates all the insensitivity and remoteness of a centrally driven national bureaucracy.

Excellent service is always delivered by excellent staff. Often we feel that their excellence is **despite** the organization rather than **because** of it. Often, too, it is the frontline staff that impress, rather than management, whose priorities seem too often directed inwards rather than outwards.

Community engagement has been patchy and we believe the Agency as an organization does not value communities as it should. It has a long way to go to demonstrate competence across the country.

DEFRA has recently published draft guidance on helping coastal communities adapt to a changing coast – Community Adaptation Planning and Engagement (CAPE). There is much in this that would help the EA to improve how it engages with flood affected communities.

We call on the EA to change management priorities, putting best practice in community engagement at the heart of all its flood risk management planning.

- *Put consideration of people before concern for wildlife*

The National Flood Forum believes that, where there is a conflict, the EA should put the needs of flood affected communities before concern for wildlife.

We see the EA hamstrung by the conflict between the Duty “to promote the Conservation of Flora and Fauna and Fisheries” and the Power to carry out Flood Risk Management works. We see flood projects too often derailed or delayed by Conservation issues.

We believe that government should give the EA a Duty to manage flooding, so that the two Duties are on an equal level. Management must then decide how to reconcile these in each case.

We call on the EA to manage projects and plan ahead better so that wildlife considerations don't disrupt flood schemes

- *Clear, accessible and accurate flood warnings*

The National Flood Forum believes that the EA's flood warning scheme would be much clearer if it was based on the communities along rivers, rather than river lengths. This would be more relevant to customers and give more meaningful information.

It should also be developed to relate flood levels to local property floor levels, so that people can immediately tell if they are at risk.

We want to see real-time flood information available on the internet, so that people can track the risk to their property online.

We call on the EA to develop a flood warning system that relates warnings to local communities and to local property floor levels and make this information available on the internet

- *Develop a National Specification for Flood Wardens*

Local Flood Wardens can play a key role in gathering local information about flooding. They can identify the properties most at risk and the vulnerable individuals who need assistance in a flood. They can be the link to other bodies and feed information to the community and to the emergency services

during a flood. They can advise householders on flood protection and resilience and give support during recovery after a flood.

There is no recognised national scheme, or specification, for Flood Wardens. The National Flood Forum believes that the EA should develop a specification for flood warden schemes within the national FRM Strategy. This should include appropriate training, possibly leading to a recognised qualification. The training could be delivered by local authorities, or other recognised institutions.

We call on the EA to develop a national specification for flood warden schemes, promoting them through the National Flood Risk Management Strategy.

- *Consistent Mapping of Flood Risk across the country*

Both the EA and Local Authorities will have responsibility for mapping elements of flood risk in future. The National Flood Forum believes that the Environment Agency should have clear responsibility to provide and maintain national maps, to a national specification. The National Flood Risk Management Strategy should require all relevant bodies to provide the information needed to prepare and maintain these maps. The maps should show flood risk from all causes – fluvial, pluvial and from groundwater – and should be accessible to all.

The maps should also show planned flood alleviation works and planned maintenance work on watercourses.

We call on the EA to take responsibility for ensuring that all flood risk is mapped to a national specification and that all relevant bodies provide the information needed to prepare and maintain these maps

- *Publication of all flood data and predictive maps*

The Environment Agency collects immense quantities of flood and rainfall data which it uses to develop predictive maps for both river and surface water flooding. We believe this data should be publicly accessible and also the predictive maps derived from it.

We call on the EA to publish all flood data and predictive maps, including those areas at risk of surface water flooding.

- *Scrutiny of Local Flood Risk Management arrangements*

Under the Floods and Water Management Bill, local Flood Risk Authorities will be free to determine their own local arrangements for flood risk management. There is no provision for Scrutiny of these arrangements, other than by the Local Authorities themselves. We believe this will lead to cosy back-patting

among authorities, with no independent review to ensure the arrangements are up to scratch.

We believe the EA should take the responsibility to scrutinize Local Flood Risk Management arrangements through its Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCC), publishing the results.

We call on the EA to take responsibility for scrutiny of local Flood Risk Management arrangements, through the Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCC)

- *Flood victim representation on RFCCs and on the EA Board*

The National Flood Forum believes it is time for all bodies that decide how flood risk is managed to include flood victims or representatives of flooded communities, so that they hear it as these communities see it. For the EA this includes the RFCCs and also the EA Board. The National Flood Forum, representing over 200 local flood groups, is ideally positioned to take on this role.

We call on the EA to press government to include representatives of flood victims and flooded communities on RFCCs and the EA Board.

3. What we want to see from Local Authorities

- *No more permissions for building on flood plains*

If Planning Authorities haven't got the message by now about allowing house building on floodplains they should be held criminally negligent. They should be made jointly responsible (with the developer) for the costs of flooding.

Householders living in developments on the flood plain not only face flood misery they face withdrawal of insurance and plummeting house values. The local Planning Authority that allowed the development should be required to provide a remedy, either a community scheme or property level flood protection.

We call on all Planning Authorities to reject proposals for house building on the flood plain and to take action to remedy flooding for those that they have allowed.

- *A firm commitment to take on Local Flood Risk Management responsibilities*

The Floods and Water Bill gives Local Authorities responsibility for dealing with flooding from surface water, non-main rivers and groundwater. For many it will be a responsibility they accept willingly, but for some it will be an

unwelcome additional burden. But this is not just an extra responsibility like many others that have been pushed onto them, it is a matter of huge importance for the communities affected by local flooding.

Local Authorities must embrace this new responsibility, on behalf of their communities and make a commitment to work with partners in delivering local flood risk management.

We call on all Local Authorities to embrace this new responsibility and allocate the resources to make it work

- *Consistency of response across the Country*

Property Flooding has the same impact on people's lives across the country. So councils need to provide a consistent service. There must be no "postcode lottery" for how flood victims are treated. They must be able to see who is doing what.

The National Flood forum believes that the Floods and Water Management Bill leaves local authorities with too much flexibility in how they deal with local flooding. DEFRA and/or the Local Government Association should produce guidance on framework structures that should be implemented across the country. This framework should be transparent about any delegation between councils and other bodies.

We call on all Local Flood Authorities to set up a clear and transparent framework for local flood risk management, adopting national guidance and best practice.

- *Transparent identification of funds for flooding*

Local Authorities have many priorities and are under constant pressure to limit spending. They need to balance priorities every day. Where funds are not "ring-fenced" there is every temptation to transfer them into local priorities.

There is a severe danger that this will happen with funds for flooding. It appears they will not be specifically identified by government, so local communities won't even be able to see how much government thinks each LA should be spending on flooding.

We call on all Lead Flood Authorities (County and Unitary Councils) to publish the funding allocated to flooding each year and "ring fence" it within their budgets.

- *Flood victim representation on Local Flood Committees*

Lead Flood Authorities will have to set up some sort of partnership committee or working group of partners to deliver their new responsibilities. Some

authorities may see this as simply an officer working party, to agree delegations and co-ordinate activity.

The National Flood Forum believes these groups must be open and transparent, meeting in public and including members of the public on the group. We want to see them include representatives of flooded communities, so that councilors hear it as flood victims see it.

We call on all Lead Flood Authorities (County and Unitary Councils) to include representatives of flooded communities in the partnership bodies that will deliver local flood risk management.

- *Promoting and supporting local flood wardens*

Local Flood Wardens can play a key role in gathering local information about flooding. They can identify the properties most at risk and the vulnerable individuals who need assistance in a flood. They can be the link to other bodies and feed information to the community and to the emergency services during a flood. They can advise householders on flood protection and resilience and give support during recovery after a flood.

The National Flood Forum believes that there should be a Flood Warden scheme for every community affected by flooding. We believe the EA should be responsible for drawing up a national specification and promoting it through the National Flood Risk Management Strategy. Local authorities should then implement this at local level.

We call on all local authorities to adopt a Flood Warden scheme, to provide on the ground support, information and advice to communities affected by flooding.