

Dr Thérèse Coffey MP  
Minister of State  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Nobel House, 17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR

16 August 2019

Dear Minister,

### **Lessons from Flooding at Wainfleet and Yorkshire**

The recent flooding event in Wainfleet, Lincolnshire and the Yorkshire Dales have had a significant impact on farmers and landowners in these areas, causing serious short-term and long-lasting damage to productive agricultural land, farm buildings and infrastructure. We welcome the recognition of the short-term impacts and the £2million recovery fund announced last week. However, there is still a need to address long-term policies and actions to help prevent and mitigate the impacts of future flood events.

#### ***Impacts on farming businesses is severe***

As a direct result of the breach of the River Steeping, an estimated 2,050 acres of Grade 2 and 3 agricultural land was flooded for upwards of 10 days in June. In addition, several thousand acres were also flooded as a result of the heavy rainfall which in some cases took a week to dissipate. Vining peas, wheat, oil seed rape, potatoes and maize were all affected and we expect the soil to take more than 2 years to recover.

More recently, the Yorkshire Dales experienced some of the most intense rainfall ever, receiving 113mm of rain in just three hours. As a direct result, there has been extensive wall damage, loss of fencing, stock and fodder losses, widespread damage to fields and paths and rerouting of water courses.

The full extent of losses to farming businesses in respect of both these events will only start to come to light in the coming months. Our organisations will be taking an active part in the Wainfleet section 19 investigation, which we understand will be conducted by Norfolk County Council. There has been a critical failure of the flood defence system for the whole community and the event has highlighted some serious questions which need answering by all those responsible for flood defences. It is important that we establish what precisely led the river bank to fail and what can be done to ensure it doesn't happen again.

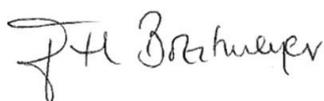
#### ***Recognising the value of farmland***

While farmers and landowners across England are resilient and well-versed in responding to severe weather, climate change will likely increase the frequency and severity of these events. Events like these expose the vulnerability of the farming sector and the need for robust response and recovery programmes when unforeseen disaster does strike, but also the need for long-term planning and policies that recognise the value of farmland in actions to prevent flooding in the first place.

There are a number of points that the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) would jointly like to highlight in order to help mitigate the risk of future flooding situations. These are relevant to the Environment Agency's Flood Strategy and forthcoming Defra Policy Statement on flood risk management.

- Government and industry must be ambitious in our approach to flood management and use the wealth of innovative engineering, scientific skills and natural flood management knowledge to overcome flooding and coastal change issues. Farmers and landowners are well placed to undertake some aspects of flood risk management work on their land and must be supported to do so in recognition of their contribution to the local community.
- Government must recognise the importance and value of productive farmland, considering wider benefits such as protecting and enhancing the environment and protecting critical infrastructure such as utilities and transport networks. With over half a million acres of high value agricultural land at risk of coastal flooding and 60% of floodplains currently farmed the investment in land, buildings and in supporting rural economies means that these farm businesses cannot simply just relocate elsewhere.
- We need a long-term funding support mechanism to recognise that those farmers and land managers who undertake natural flood management or allow their land to occasionally flood in a controlled manner are providing a public benefit, often at the expense of crops or land, by reducing flood risk to local communities, infrastructure and the environment.
- The Environment Agency must uphold its statutory duty to minimise the risk of embankment failures, and work in partnership with internal drainage boards and lead local flood authorities to undertake flood risk management in areas where they are best placed to do so, evidenced by the success of the de-maining pilots.
- Government must look to strengthen controls and management of burrowing animals in flood embankments, plan for controlled overtopping in designated areas, and make a proper investment in maintaining or building water control structures such as pumping stations and sluice structures.

The CLA and the NFU look forward to working closely with you on flood risk management issues.



Tim Breitmeyer  
**CLA President**



Minette Batters  
**NFU President**

