

**Flooding Summit – 10 September 2007**  
**Keynote speech for Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs**  
**and the Environment**

**Scene setting - Climate change**

- 1. As we meet here in 2007, there is a growing consensus that climate change and global warming are the biggest threats to humanity and our civilisation.**
  
- 2. Climate change predictions suggest that during this century our climate will become wetter and stormier and sea levels will rise. As a result we can expect an increase in flood risk for all types of flooding. In some areas of Scotland the potential risk of flooding could double before the end of the century.**
  
- 3. This increase in flood risk could be damaging to both Scotland's economy and society as a whole. How we**

**manage these risks and events will be one of our main challenges for the future. But it is clear that we have to leave behind the idea that we only act after a flood.**

## **Introduction**

**4. In Government we want Scotland to become wealthier, fairer, healthier, safer and stronger**

**5. Today's summit is about how we can create a safer Scotland by protecting lives and property from flooding and at the same time commit to securing a greener future for Scotland. In Government, we also aim to have all portfolios working to all our strategic objectives rather than continuing the silo approach to government. Today, the Environment Minister Michael Russell and our Climate Change Minister Stewart Stevenson are therefore participating in today's discussions.**

- 6. In our manifesto earlier this year we said that we would review flooding legislation to ensure that it is fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to take into account the need for legislation that considers the case for sustainable flood prevention measures.**
- 7. I have invited you all here today to start this process by first discussing how we can take a more modern and sustainable approach to reduce the risk of flooding in Scotland.**
- 8. We now know with greater accuracy the number of unprotected properties at a 0.5% probability (1 in 200 year return period) of flooding in Scotland. For river flooding there are 73,000 properties and for coastal 26,000 properties.**

**9. We must work together to reach a consensus about how we can provide longer term solutions to reduce the risk of flooding to these properties.**

### **Flood Prevention (S) Act 1961**

**10. I think we all agree that the 1961 Flood Prevention Act will not meet our requirements for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We now have to think wider than just the traditional flood prevention scheme. We have to think more strategically and be more innovative about how we respond to flood risk.**

### **Aims of summit**

**11. Our aims for today's summit are to have a frank and productive discussion about what Scotland needs to do to meet the challenges of an increased risk of flooding. To recognise and translate existing good management practices into policies for all of Scotland**

**to follow. I want Scotland to be more proactive about tackling flooding.**

**12. It will be easy for us all to focus on the shortcomings of the current statutory process for bringing forward flood prevention schemes under the 1961 Act. But today I ask that we think more strategically about the future and consider the bigger picture - what needs to happen before the statutory process? How practitioners decide on the right option for a particular community and the information they need to gather to make that informed decision.**

**13. To do so I want us to consider now:**

- what legislation we need to support a more sustainable, modern approach to flood risk that will meet the impacts of climate change;**
- how we can make flexible funding available and join up different funding streams, for example, the Rural**

**Stewardship Scheme, to make it possible to consider a wider range of flood management options;**

- how we transpose the proposed EC Floods Directive and what steps we need to take to ensure that we comply with its requirements;**
- what tools we need to assess future flood risk and to share this knowledge base and**
- who should have responsibility for flood risk management at local, catchment and national levels in the future?**

**14. We now have an opportunity to completely reassess how we should prepare for and increase our resilience to future flood threats.**

**15. In Parliament last week, the First Minister Alex Salmond announced that we are fulfilling our pledge by including a new Flooding Bill in our first**

**Programme for Government. Responding to and managing the flooding risk is therefore a priority for the new Scottish Government.**

- 16. I would like to thank you all for accepting my invitation to attend today to make a difference and help develop and influence the development of the Bill and future flood risk management policy in Scotland.**

### **Perth**

- 17. I think it is appropriate that we are holding this summit here in Perth - a town that has seen its fair share of serious flooding over the centuries with millions of pounds worth of damage to business and residential properties.**

- 18. The most recent was in 1993 when some 1500 properties were flooded at an estimated cost of £40m. This was the largest flood in Perth since 1814. Perth now has a flood prevention scheme, which at it's time**

**of construction was the most expensive flood prevention scheme in Scotland. Since then it has saved the town from further inundation.**

### **Recent events in England**

**19. Before I go any further I think it is important that we take some time to reflect on recent tragic events in England. If we ever needed reminding about why we must act to protect lives and property from floods we need only read the first hand accounts of people whose lives have been so devastated by the latest floods. In doing so it is important to remember that some of these people will still be trying to put their lives back together when we are planning our Christmas/winter holidays.**

**20. We are grateful to the Environment Agency for attending today to share with us the lessons learned from events in Yorkshire in June.**

## Civil contingencies/emergency planning

21. After the recent flooding events in England, the Government wrote to the Chairs of the eight Scottish Strategic Co-ordinating Groups (SCG), in which local responders co-ordinate preparation and response to emergencies in Police Force areas, seeking assurances that they were satisfied that arrangements were in place to deal with flooding in their area. All SCGs responded positively regarding their arrangements for dealing with flooding. Many referred to the process of risk assessment, which includes an assessment of various types of flooding in their area, and all SCGs have published a Community Risk Register, which describes the risk rating for flooding in their areas.

**22. Of course, representing the Moray constituency in the Scottish Parliament, I have a personal interest in today's discussions and outcomes. In July 1997, 150mm of rain fell over 2 days, resulting in 1200 people being evacuated from over 400 homes in the Elgin area. There were further serious floods in 2002 and as recently as July I visited many constituents whose homes and businesses had once again been flooded following the recent heavy rainfall. I am only too aware from my constituents of the distress that flood events like this cause, the difficulties they experienced repairing the damage to property and the despair of losing family treasures, photographs and memories**

**23. I am grateful to the National Flood Forum who will give us an insight into the realities of flooding and I ask that as we go through the day we remember why we are here.**

## **Flooding Issues Advisory Committee**

24. As many of you here today will know the Flooding Issues Advisory Committee (FIAC) was set up in 2005 to offer advice on how to take forward Scotland's National Flooding Framework. FIAC was an excellent example of stakeholders working together to reach consensus on difficult issues. I am grateful to the Members of FIAC and its Sub-Committees for their work and advice. The final report from FIAC will be published later this month to coincide with a proposed debate on flooding.

25. As well as offering advice on a wide range of flooding issues, FIAC has been pivotal to the process

of developing our understanding of sustainable flood management.

### **Sustainable flood management**

26. I think we would all agree that taking a sustainable approach to flood management means being proactive at a strategic level. It involves stakeholders, including the public, working together from the beginning to share responsibility for final decisions. It is about joined up thinking, between and within organisations, when developing strategies, plans and programmes.

27. Practitioners will have to consider how an incremental approach using a combination of solutions across the catchment might help meet new challenges as we go through the next 100 or 200 years. That approach may well include engineered

**works; but these will be sympathetic to the environment in which they are built.**

**28. This afternoon MWH will present the latest proposals from FIAC on how we might define sustainable flood management. Proposals that recognise that sustainable flood management is not about 'soft' versus 'hard' engineering. But about considering a wide range of options:**

- from flood warning schemes to river restoration projects;**
- from flood prevention schemes to how we collect data and assess risk;**
- from campaigns to raise awareness in areas at risk of flooding to reassessing how land is managed;**
- from considering the role of planning and building standards to sustainable drainage systems.**

- 29. We must consider them all if we are to meet challenges in a way that will satisfy economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainability, both now and for future generations.**
- 30. FIAC's proposals, along with a draft strategic environment assessment, will be released for public consultation at the end of this year.**
- 31. Today we will hear from a range of stakeholders about their role in promoting sustainable flood management and what they see as their main challenges for the future.**

### **Raising awareness of flood risk**

**32. We will hear from SEPA about its role in promoting sustainable flood management through improved risk assessment, flood warnings schemes and awareness raising in communities identifies as at risk from flooding. There will also be challenges for SEPA when it comes to meeting the requirements in the EC floods Directive.**

### **Land management techniques**

**33. We will hear from the Forestry Commission and WWF of the importance of working with the environment to restore rivers, and promote sustainable forest management.**

## **Scottish Water and City of Glasgow Council**

**34. In July 2002, 75mm of rain fell with intensities of up to 95mm/hr. resulting in severe flooding from overland flow, urban watercourses and sewers in the Shettleston area of Glasgow. Transport infrastructure was disrupted and around 500 houses were affected. The estimated cost of the flood damage was £100m.**

**35. Scottish Water and City of Glasgow Council will speak to us today about the challenges of protecting homes and businesses against similar events in the future. We will hear of their experiences and the advantages of working in partnership on the Glasgow Strategic Drainage Plan to address the particular problems of sewer and surface water management.**

## **The Association of British Insurers**

**36. It is important that we hear from the insurance industry today about its role analysing future risks and dealing with many of the consequences of flooding.**

## **Planning**

**37. We must consider how the planning and building standards system can complement each other to help address flooding issues.**

**38. I am constantly being told by people I meet that not enough is being done to ensure that planning policy takes into account flooding issues. The Government is keen to know if this is indeed the case and, if so, to take action.**

## **Catchment level flood planning**

**39. I am sure that all today's presentations will have common themes running through them; common concerns and hopefully some common proposals for the future. I hope we will all recognise the benefits of developing future flood management policy together and joining up processes wherever possible so that they complement, rather than conflict with, each other; so that they are seamless rather than encourage duplication.**

**40. The Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 brings together sustainable flood management with the River Basin Management Planning process so that we think about water quantity along side water quality. Add this to the requirement in the Floods Directive for flood plans and for a competent authority to pull everything together, it is time to openly debate who should be responsible for flood risk management at a strategic level.**

**41. Do we now need a single national flooding authority? If yes; what powers might that body have? Should it prioritise future schemes and allocate funding? Could SEPA assume all or some of these responsibilities?**

- 42. Do we need regional bodies to consider flooding issues at catchment level and develop flood plans? If yes; could area advisory groups, set up under the Water Framework Directive, carry out this role and should sustainable flood management be fully integrated into the river basin planning process?**
- 43. Who should be responsible for co-ordinating plans at a national level?**
- 44. Having asked these questions I must make it clear that Scotland has already has too many public bodies so this must not be viewed as an exercise to create new ones. It makes sense in the first instance to first consider how the role and responsibilities of existing bodies might be extended to carry out new work. It is essential that in an attempt to co-ordinate flooding related matters we don't create unnecessary layers of red tape for practitioners.**

## **Conclusions**

**45. We have to debate all the controversial questions about responsibilities, prioritisation and future funding now. This is our opportunity to start from scratch and consider what is best for a safer, greener Scotland. In doing so we must identify and learn from the best practice examples that are already being taking forward nationally and internationally.**

**46. The challenges for the future are great but we must take this opportunity to consider our future responsibilities and roles as stakeholders both individually and collectively. Clearly, no one body can do it all on its own. We have to work together on various levels to ensure that future strategies, programmes, plans, processes and funding streams are not taken forward in isolation.**

**47. This is what today's debate is all about - a new start. The decisions we take will influence to what extent we can save our communities from devastation in the coming decades – to protect people and to protect property in the coming decades.**

**48. I urge you to take this opportunity to contribute to the process and influence future flood management policy in Scotland.**