

Defuse the 'weather bomb' with better protection and stronger resilience says Environment Agency Chief Executive

A new 'twin track' approach focused on better flood protection and resilience is needed to deal with the climate emergency following weeks of record breaking river levels and flooding across the UK, the Chief Executive of the Environment Agency will argue today (Tuesday 25 February).

In a speech at the World Water-Tech Innovation Summit in central London, Sir James Bevan will say that while we must continue to build and maintain strong defences to reduce the risk of communities being flooded, in a climate emergency, communities will also need to become more resilient so that when flooding does happen it poses much less risk to people, does much less damage and life can get back to normal much quicker.

Sir James will say:

First, we must continue to do what we have been doing for some years now: building and maintaining strong defences to reduce the risk of communities being flooded.

But in the face of the climate emergency, we now need a second, parallel, track: making our communities more resilient to flooding so that when it does happen it poses much less risk to people, does much less damage, and life can get back to normal much quicker.

The best way to defuse the weather bomb is better protection and stronger resilience. We need both.

The Environment Agency is already spending £2.6bn building new flood defences that will better protect 300,000 properties by 2021 and over £1bn to maintain existing defences in England. Over 200,000 properties have already benefitted. Of that £2.6bn, 55% is going to reduce flood risk from rivers and 45% is reducing risk on the coast. The investment programme will also better protect nearly 6,000 miles of motorways and local roads, 300 miles of railways and over 700,00 acres of farmland.

Later this year, the Environment Agency will publish its new floods strategy, setting out plans to prepare for and adapt to the risks that climate change is creating.

While recognising that it is unrealistic to ban all development on flood plains given the nature of England's geography, Sir James will also argue that development in such areas should only happen when there is "no real alternative".

He will say:

We cannot realistically ban all development in the flood plain: it is where most of our towns and cities are, and because our country has so many rivers much of England is a flood plain. So as the population grows, we are likely to see the number of properties in the flood plain almost double over the next 50 years.

But the clue is in the name: flood plain. So we can and should insist that development only happens there if there is no real alternative, that any such development doesn't increase other people's flood risk...and that properties built on the flood plain are flood resilient, for example with the garages on the ground floor and the people higher up.

Greater resilience also means designing new places, buildings and infrastructure so that they are built to cope with flooding. It means building back better after a flood, not simply replacing what we had before, so that homes, businesses and infrastructure are more resilient to future events. And it means accepting the hard truth that in a few places, the scale of coastal erosion and the risk of flooding from rivers or the sea will become so big that it may be better for communities to choose to relocate out of harm's way. So not only do we need to build back better.

Sometimes we will need to build back in better places.

Sir James will also reiterate that more natural methods will be needed to manage flood water like planting trees to retain water when it rains, restoring artificially straightened rivers to their natural curves to slow the flow of water, making space on land for water to collect there rather than flood communities, creating wetland habitats that hold water and enhance biodiversity.

His speech comes as the Environment Agency continues to respond around the clock to the ongoing impacts of Storm Dennis.

England has already received over 200% of its average February rainfall so far with some areas experiencing a month's worth of rain in 24 hours. River levels have exceeded existing records across the country. The Rivers Colne,

Ribble, Calder, Aire, Trent, Severn, Wye, Lugg and Derwent are among the many rivers where records have been broken due to continuous wet weather.

Around 1,000 Environment Agency staff per day have been mobilised on the ground to operate flood defences and temporary pumps, clear debris from rivers, inspect damaged flood defences and make repairs. Environment Agency operational teams have put up more than 6km of temporary flood barriers across the country and flood defences have protected nearly 25,000 properties from the ongoing impacts of Storm Dennis. Community information officers are also out supporting affected communities offering advice and assistance.

The Environment Agency is urging people to be aware of their flood risk, sign up to flood warnings, make a flood plan and not to drive or walk through flood water. The public can keep up to date with the latest safety advice, call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or follow @EnvAgency on Twitter for the latest flood updates.

Dialogue and cooperation is essential for a peaceful and lasting Somalia

Thank you Mr President, and I also want to thank our briefers. I thought Dan Smith's presentation was particularly interesting. I think it's a helpful reminder that it is rarely the case and certainly not in Somalia, that all of a country's problems can be fixed through a sort of top-down political process in smoke filled rooms in the capital city. And that actually a bottom-up, community-based wider contextual understanding is important. I thought your point around the need for this Council, as it thinks about conflict prevention, which is something that we struggle with sometimes, to be thinking about climate risk as part of that and the data input was really an important one as well and I hope we can take that forward collectively.

Mr President, let me start with one of the most positive elements recently and congratulate the Government of Somalia on reaching the major milestone of eligibility for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative. And let me commend the cooperation between the Federal Government and the Federal Member States on the financial reforms which have enabled this. It's vital now that that cooperation between the Federal Government and the Federal Member States deepens and extends to political and security reform, which will allow Somalia to fulfil the criteria necessary for debt relief.

Let me also welcome the recent enactment of the Electoral Law, which President Farmajo noted was a and I quote, "A chance to execute democratic rights for one person, one vote in the forthcoming 2021 elections". But this is only the first step. They are essential aspects of the elections which are still unresolved. And we are concerned about spoilers trying to push the

process off track. So it is vital, Mr President, that the Somali parliament takes urgent steps to make progress on the passage of the Amendments to the Political Parties Act, which will allow parties to register for the elections and to address other unresolved questions in the electoral law, including; the definition of constituencies, the allocation of seats to constituencies, how the 30% quota of seats for women to which Somalia has committed will be implemented and management of seats in Benadir and Somaliland. These questions need to be answered in order to make the electoral law technically implementable and fundable. If we are to deliver peaceful, inclusive, credible and transparent one person, one vote elections in line with the provisional constitution of Somalia.

Mr President, we regret that their National Independent Election Commission (NIEC) is unable to operate freely in all Federal Member States. NIEC is an independent and impartial technical body empowered by the Constitution, and we call on Somali authorities at all levels to cooperate fully with NIEC to meet the registration of political parties and to take steps to ensure media freedoms.

Now, Mr President, if that is an example of one of the problems currently facing us in Somalia, we believe that the resolution comes principally through dialogue and cooperation between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Federal Member States. It is simply essential to a peaceful and agreed process for the transition of power. Elections are a crucial step towards a political settlement in Somalia and a broader constitutional review. And so we call on the Federal Government and the Federal Member States to engage constructively and urgently in consensus building to agree how the electoral model will be implemented.

Mr President, to ensure broader stability in Somalia, we urge all stakeholders in Galmudug State to engage in dialogue on local reconciliation, to preserve the significant efforts and progress of the last seven months. We are concerned that a divided Galmudug with multiple claims to leadership will be harder to govern, and compromise must be made to avoid the risk of instability and conflict. We also urge all parties in Jubaland to ease tensions and address differences through dialogue and compromise.

Now Mr President, let me turn to security and security reforms. We are at a critical juncture in discussions on a long term future of international support to Somali security and how we support Somalia in taking the lead. This Council mandated an independent review of Somali security after 2021, and we urge regional partners to engage in consultations with Somalia, with the United Nations, with the African Union to help deliver a joint and unified solution for a post-2021 security model in Somalia. Rapid progress on security reforms is vital, including commitment to delivery of a Somali-led transition plan and the implementation of a National Security Architecture. And it is crucial that the drawdown of AMISOM troops this month happens in line with the threat assessment on the ground. Last time round, this approach wasn't taken and it had a negative impact, so better consultation is important.

We remain concerned by the ongoing climate and conflict-induced humanitarian

crisis. The current desert locust crisis in Somalia and the wider region is extremely worrying and the United Kingdom is coordinating closely with partners to limit the locust infestation and mitigate the impact of crop losses through surveillance and spraying operations. We call on the international community to provide more funding for the humanitarian response and to step up efforts to build resilience and long-term climate indications initiatives in Somalia. And I would just note, in the last 12 months, the UK has given over \$400 million to the various humanitarian, political and security requirements in Somalia.

Finally, let me pay tribute to the United Nations for its continued support under the SRSG to Somalia. We pay tribute to the ongoing commitment and sacrifices of AMISOM troop contributing countries and of course, of the Somali National Security Forces in the fight against Al-Shabaab. They are brave and tenacious men and women who are fighting for not only Somali security, but for the region and for all of us.

Somalia and its international supporters face a huge task in the coming years in delivering inclusive national elections and a transition to Somalia-led security. The UK will continue to stand firmly alongside Somalia, the United Nations, the African Union in these efforts, but without substantial progress, both on elections and on consensus building between the different levels of government, there is a risk that our next discussion of Somalia will be a much more difficult discussion. So let's do everything we can to prevent that from happening.

Thank you.

[Israeli settlements, February 2020: UK statement](#)



James Cleverly, Minister for the Middle East and North Africa said:

The UK condemns Israel's announcement to move forward with the construction of 1,077 housing units in Givat Hamatos, in southern

Jerusalem. This follows the announcement on 20 February to advance 2,200 units in the existing settlement of Har Homa.

Settlement construction in these highly sensitive areas undermines the viability of a future Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem. The UK's position on Israeli settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law and damaging to renewed efforts to launch peace negotiations. We urge Israel to reverse this decision immediately.

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[Environment Secretary statement on flooding and Storm Dennis](#)

Madame Deputy Speaker, with permission, I will make a statement to the House on recent flooding caused by Storm Dennis which followed Storm Ciara and affected many parts of the country.

I would like to begin by extending my condolences to the families and friends of the five individuals who have sadly lost their lives through the storms. I am sure the thoughts of the whole House are with those grieving families, today.

Our thoughts are also with all those who have suffered damage to their properties as a result of the storms.

To have one's home flooded is an incredibly traumatic experience, and I am conscious that some have flooded repeatedly over recent years.

Storm Dennis cleared the UK during the course of Monday 17 February. However this remains a live incident, and I would urge people in at-risk areas to remain vigilant. We are monitoring the situation closely, and most areas are moving into recovery phase. However, rainfall over the last few days is still leading to higher water levels – so we will continue to see effects this week.

Communities have been affected across our Union.

Madame Deputy Speaker, we have had an incredibly wet winter. Some areas have already received almost double their average rainfall for February, with others experiencing a month's worth of rain in just 24 hours. Records have been broken.

Eighteen river gauges across 15 rivers recorded their highest levels on

record during or triggered by Storms Ciara and Dennis, including the Colne, Ribble, Calder, Aire, Trent, Severn, Wye, Lugg and Derwent.

Storm Ciara flooded over 1,340 properties. And the latest number of properties flooded by Storm Dennis stands at over 1,400. Wales has also seen significant impacts and we are in close contact with the Welsh Government.

In anticipation of the storm we stood up our national flood response centre on Friday 14 February. The scale of the response has been huge – from setting up temporary defences to knocking on doors and issuing residents with warnings.

The Environment Agency issued 348 flood warnings for Storm Ciara and 514 flood warnings for Storm Dennis. On 17 February we saw a record concurrent total of 632 flood warnings and alerts issued in a single day.

Two severe flood warnings, 107 flood warnings, and 207 flood alerts remain in place in England. There are an additional 13 flood warnings and 39 flood alerts that remain in place in Wales and one flood warning in Scotland.

We have been sharing information with the public, so people can prepare for flooding wherever they live. We have deployed over three miles of temporary flood barriers and 90 mobile pumps and we have been keeping structures and rivers clear of debris. Over 1,000 Environment Agency staff per day have been deployed with the assistance of around 80 military personnel.

In Yorkshire, the military helped deploy temporary defences in Ilkley, and kept the road open between Mytholmroyd and Hebden Bridge in Calderdale.

I would like to record my thanks to all the response teams – including the Environment Agency, local authorities, our emergency services, and the military. They are still working hard, with over 20 government bodies, local authorities and volunteers at work across the country.

The Government acted swiftly to activate the Bellwin Scheme to help local authorities cope with the cost of response in the immediate aftermath. On Tuesday 18 February we also triggered the Flood Recovery Framework – to help communities get back on their feet.

I am working alongside the Secretary of State for Housing to help households and businesses recover. This includes making available hardship payments, and council tax and business rate relief. Households and businesses will also be able to access grants of up to £5,000 to help make them more resilient to future flooding and a ministerial recovery group is coordinating efforts across Government.

Storms Ciara and Dennis affected thousands of acres of farmland so we will consider the need to extend the Farming Recovery Fund, once we have all of the necessary data.

Madame Deputy Speaker, investments made in recent years have significantly improved our resilience – but there is much more to do. We are investing £2.6 billion in flood defences – over 1,000 flood defence schemes to better

protect 300,000 homes by 2021.

To put this into context, in the floods of 2007, 55,000 properties were flooded, but with similar volumes of water in places this year, thankfully far fewer properties have been flooded and flood defence schemes have protected over 90,000 properties in England this winter.

Our manifesto commits us to a further £4 billion in new funding for flood defences over the next five years. Since the incidents of 2015, we've strengthened and improved our system of flood warnings.

In 2016 we introduced the Flood Re scheme so insurance cover for floods is accessible for at risk properties. An independent review of the data on insurance cover will help us ensure that it's working as effectively as possible.

Of course, we recognise that none of these steps will take away from the anguish of those who have suffered flooding in these most recent storms. Climate change is making the UK warmer and wetter, with more frequent extreme weather events. We need to make nature's power part of our solution alongside traditional engineered defences.

We are already investing £10m to restore our peatland habitats, planting enough trees to cover an area the size of East Anglia with a new £640m Nature for Climate Fund and supporting farmers to be part of preventing flooding through our new Environmental Land Management scheme to reduce and delay peak flows in our landscapes.

Later this year, we will set out our policies to tackle flooding in the long term and the Environment Agency will be publishing their updated Flood and Coasts Strategy.

Madame Deputy Speaker, this country will also lead global ambition as hosts of COP26, urging the world to achieve net zero in a way that helps nature recover, reduces global warming, and addresses the causes of these extreme weather events.

And I therefore commend this statement to the House.

[New Attorney General sworn in](#)

The Rt Hon Suella Braverman QC MP was sworn-in today at the Royal Courts of Justice as Attorney General for England and Wales.

The Lord Chancellor, the Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, the Lord Chief Justice, The Lord Burnett of Maldon, and the Chair of the Bar Council, Amanda Pinto QC, spoke at the ceremony to welcome the Rt Hon Suella Braverman QC MP

to her role.

The Lord Chancellor said:

I am delighted to welcome the new Attorney General to this vital and historic role.

The relationship between the Law Officers and the Lord Chancellor is a crucial one. I look forward to working closely with the Attorney on matters relating to the rule of law, which is the cornerstone of our democracy and a major factor in our success as a civilised and prosperous nation.

Commenting on the ceremony the Rt Hon Suella Braverman QC MP said:

It is a privilege to be sworn in as Attorney General and a moment I will cherish as the second woman to be appointed to this historic role.

Restoring confidence in the criminal justice system is my top priority. I want to thank my predecessor for his work in this area and his distinguished service to Government.

I want to thank the Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice for their kind words. I look forward to working with them both in the unique roles we each play in upholding the rule of law at the heart of the UK constitution.

The Attorney General was joined by her family and the Solicitor General, the Rt Hon Michael Ellis QC MP, for the ceremony.