From the Chairman of the Committee

Emma Howard Boyd,
Chairman,
Environment Agency

28 November 2017

Thank you for attending the Committee’s session on Tuesday 21 November to discuss the work of the Environment Agency. It was helpful to review with you and your colleagues how the Agency is delivering against its priorities of enhancing the environment and managing flood risk.

You gave us a number of assurances on the Agency’s performance on managing waste, ensuring water quality and regulating shale gas extraction effectively. We will be keeping the Agency’s performance on these issues under review.

We are, however, keen to get an immediate update from you on the crucial issue of the EA’s ability to protect communities from flooding. Responding to Sheryll Murray’s question on whether the Agency was prepared for any flooding this winter, you said:

Yes, and a huge amount of time and effort has gone into, in particular, our winter preparedness since the 2015-16 floods, in terms of the new equipment that has been bought—whether that is command vehicles or additional temporary flood barriers—the number of our staff who have been trained to be able to help and get involved in incidents as and when they take place, and the amount of warning and informing we do. ¹

We were therefore concerned to read media reports that flooding in the north of England only two days after our session had caught residents of some communities off-guard. Wider criticism focussed on a failure to have implemented actions committed to in response to Storm Desmond in winter 2015-16. It is essential that people are given adequate warning of impending flooding and it is not acceptable if communities are not told as soon as information

¹ Oral evidence before the EFRA Committee, 21 November 2017, Q33
becomes available of a possible risk their homes and businesses. We would be grateful for
detailed information on how and when the MetOffice and Environment Agency became
aware of potential heavy rainfall and what actions were taken to ensure that communities
were prepared.

I would be grateful for an urgent response so that communities can be reassured as we head
into winter that everything possible but is being done to prevent and respond effectively to
flooding.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of the State and will be publishing our correspondence
on my Committee’s website.

Neil Parish MP
Chairman of the Committee