Dear Neil,

Publication of government response to consultation on the National Policy Statement for Water Resources Infrastructure – nationally significant infrastructure types and sizes.

I write to update the EFRA committee on the progress of developing a National Policy Statement for water resources infrastructure. We discussed this recently at your inquiry into the water industry. Alongside this, we intend to amend the types and sizes of nationally significant water resources infrastructure projects within the Planning Act 2008.

In April 2018, Defra consulted on the types and sizes of water projects that should be considered nationally significant. In the consultation we proposed to amend the current definitions and thresholds within the Act with three specific changes – (i) introduce a universal metric of 80 million litres per day deployable output to all resource types, (ii) raise the hold-back capacity of qualifying reservoirs from 10 billion litres to 30 billion litres, and (iii) introduce a new distinct resource type, desalination.

Amending the Act in this way creates a level playing field for nationally significant infrastructure types. It will allow water companies to compare and evaluate them on their individual merits in each specific context. The National Policy Statement will streamline the planning application process for these water resources projects. This means they can be delivered in a timely manner and to a high standard when and where needed. The National Infrastructure Commission’s report also drew attention to the need to increase water supply through new water resource infrastructure alongside demand management.

Today I have published the summary of responses and government response to this consultation. The amendments proposed in this consultation received support from a broad range of stakeholders. For this reason, I will be introducing an affirmative resolution statutory instrument to amend the Act.

I intend to lay the amendments to the Act in October and consult on the draft National Policy Statement in the autumn. I would appreciate it if you could bring the government’s consultation response to the committee’s attention.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

DR THERESE COFFEY MP