Thank you for your letter of 10 July 2019 about an update on the National Policy Statement for Water Resources Infrastructure and an update on the reservoir safety research project my department has commissioned.

I previously wrote to you on the 17 December 2018 when I highlighted that due to some changes to the scope of the research project, an extension for the overall project was required. At that stage we were reviewing the findings from the first stage of the project with a view to refining Stage 2, and we had anticipated that the full research would be finished by the end of June 2019. I am pleased to attach at Annex A a summary of the findings from the first stage for your information.

Unfortunately, due to the changes we made to the scope of the final stage of the project, my Department needed to procure an amended contract with the agency undertaking the research, Mott MacDonald. As a result, colleagues from Mott MacDonald were subsequently delayed in starting Stage 2 of the project and we are now expecting the findings to be finalised in Autumn 2019.

However, in order to provide an indication of the next stage of our work I will happily outline the various objectives of Stage 2 of the research project here. The first task will be a review of the report entitled “Probability Matrix for the Risk Designation of Controlled Reservoirs under the Reservoirs (Scotland) Act 2011: Probability Matrix Development, Final Report”, (Aecom, 2016) with a view to assessing its applicability to England.

Secondly, we will review the current risk designation thresholds and categories, and in particular whether the current interpretation of the boundary between “high risk” and “not high risk” is appropriate and also to consider the merits of introducing a three-tier risk designation system.

Thirdly, we will examine the criteria for large raised reservoirs to consider whether the current practice of regulating reservoirs on the basis of stored volume is the best way of identifying the most critical reservoirs.

The final objective of Stage 2 will be to identify whether there are certain types of reservoir which could be deregulated, or designated “not high risk” on the basis of usage,
construction type or maintenance in accordance with Section 2C of the Reservoirs Act 1975.

We are expecting a draft report to be provided to Defra and the Advisory Group for comments this month and officials will be holding an Advisory Group meeting on the 15 August to discuss this draft report. The final peer-reviewed report is programmed for issue in Autumn 2019.

I will write to you again once we have the full research output and have assessed how the findings will be used to inform our policy thinking for reservoir safety. In regards to the second update you requested, the government response to the committee on the draft national policy statement (NPS) for water resources infrastructure will be published alongside the final NPS after the summer recess.

Thank you again for your letter.

With every good wish,

Michael Gove