

I must start by thanking all those who were able to join us in London for our annual conference. I felt it was a great day of networking with our associate members, meeting some of the students who are so enthusiastic about the future of our sector, and catching up with many members, both new and more recognisable faces. I think the new format gave us plenty of time to take more questions than ever before on a wide range of topics. Here are some of my key takeaways from our speakers' excellent presentations.

Firstly, the challenges from climate change, as set out by Professor Dame Julia King, are immense and action needs to be taken immediately to avoid catastrophic consequences. Without doubt, we are doing too little, too late, to avoid massive changes to our climate that will challenge us with more floods and droughts on a scale we have not yet seen.

Ian Titherington unambiguously demonstrated the benefits of getting on and enacting Schedule 3 of the Floods & Water Management Act 2010 as soon as possible, making sure truly sustainable drainage schemes are built into every development. This is something that ADA has been calling for, and we will continue to lobby all political parties for this commitment.

It was therefore encouraging to hear Emma Hardy MP express her support for Schedule 3 in her address, but we want to see this firmly in the manifesto. Emma demonstrated a personal interest in managing flood risk that was most welcome and we look forward to engaging on water management matters with her, and all of the political parties ahead of, and beyond, the next general election.

Alan Lovell set out the achievements of the capital programme of government investment in FCERM that the Environment Agency (EA) manages to better protect homes, property, and land. However, he also highlighted the challenge of the current revenue allocation being £34 million below the maintenance need identified by the EA. Given that this need focuses squarely on high consequence assets, and does not consider the condition of watercourses in the same manner,

it is likely that the gap could unfortunately be even greater.

The National Audit Office's recent report (p10) plainly set out that fully funding the revenue allocation must be the minimum requirement. Defra should have made it clear to the Treasury that not securing such revenue funding will be 200,000 properties less well protected, almost identical to the number of properties better protected by the capital programme.

ADA have been pressing for a better balance of capital and revenue for a long time, and the evidence from the EA's own cost benefit analysis is clear set. Revenue spend on FCERM asset maintenance provides £11 of benefit for every £1 spent, whilst capital investment returns a still impressive, but more diminutive, £5 for every £1 spent. These figures are not disputed and we cannot afford to wait for the next six year capital programme. It is telling that the NAO highlights that levers already exist for government to transfer funding between capital and revenue programmes.

If we are to make best use of any public funding, we need to work in partnership and it was pleasing to hear Alan's commitment to using Public Sector Cooperation Agreements (PSCAs) between risk management authorities, as well as exploring de-maining where there are benefits for the local rate payers.

Lisa Pinney's presentation showed that there can be substantial benefits to be born from synergies between water management and other disciplines. The Coal Authority are pursuing heat energy recovery from old mine workings and it was encouraging to hear how closely they are working in partnership with IDBs.

Finally, our international speaker was our good friend through EUWMA, Adriano Battilani, a true Italian expert in water management. The challenges of flood and drought in Italy should be a wake up for us all of what may be just around the corner for us in the UK. Our Italian colleagues are facing those challenges with a determination that we must match, to create much more storage of water when we have too much, so we can better



utilise it when we have too little. It is truly shocking that as a nation we have not built any significant water storage infrastructure for nearly 40 years, and that plans in development could yet take another 20 years to deliver.

We must act now to overcome funding models that inhibit flood mitigation and water storage being combined, we should no longer allow process to get in the way of innovation.

ADA will continue to press on all of these issues on behalf of our members throughout 2024. I look forward to meeting you in the new year, either at our second annual Environment Day in Thorney on Friday 2 February (p6), at one of our branch meetings around the country, or at a workshop launching our second edition of the ADA Good Governance Guide for IDB Members.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Caudwell'.

ROBERT CAUDWELL
Chairman





ADA Flood & Water Conference 2023

INNES THOMSON

After a three-year break, ADA's annual conference returned to the magnificent setting of the Great Hall and Thomas Telford Theatre at the Institution of Civil Engineers' headquarters at One Great George Street, London on Tuesday 21 November.

Attended by over 200 people, the new format of the ADA Flood & Water Conference allowed for extensive networking between members and associate members, more convenient and cheaper travel to London for delegates, and double the usual number of speakers.

We are very keen to hear back from members about what they thought of the new format of the event and its return to London.

ADA was delighted to welcome a top-quality range of eminent speakers covering a variety of pertinent subjects. The afternoon presentations started on a sombre note with Lord De Ramsey,

ADA's past President, saying a few kind words in memory of John Martin OBE, followed by Robert Caudwell remembering the life of James Grant, both having passed away recently. John and James were both stalwarts of our industry and will be fondly remembered and greatly missed. A moment's silence was held as a token of respect by all present.

Robert then turned to the first keynote speaker of the day and warmly welcomed Emma Hardy MP, the Shadow Floods Minister and MP for West Hull & Hessle.

Emma Hardy MP

Emma started by congratulating ADA for its longstanding contribution to water level and flood risk management over the years, its model of stable governance and long-term planning, and its reputation as the go-to organisation for the subject.

Quickly, the audience appreciated that Emma had herself seen the effects of flooding, when floodwater entered the classroom of the primary school she was teaching at. She talked first-hand of the misery she witnessed that flooding caused to children, families and businesses, commenting that for her *"Flooding isn't political, it's personal."*

Emma went on to recognise that flooding does not just affect people and properties, but also farmland, food security and the environment we live in. She challenged why houses are being built in the same way despite increasing risks, but she also acknowledged that we cannot and should not stop development in Flood Zone 3 areas, pointing out that the whole of Hull sits in such a flood risk zone. Instead, Emma said that we simply need to avoid *"building the wrong homes in the wrong places."*

Emma was strongly supportive of the enabling of Schedule 3 of the Floods & Water Management



Emma Hardy MP

Act 2010 for the creation of SuDS Approval Bodies (SABs) to oversee a step-change in England’s approach to sustainable drainage. Emma said that she was struggling to understand why it has taken ten years of discussion without action on this. She went on to praise the public authorities in her constituency for the way they are coming together to address the challenges from flooding, and she expressed her particular gratitude to Andrew McLachlan, the Chief Executive of Yorkshire & Humber Drainage Boards, for having helped her to better understand many of the issues. Emma went on to say that she supports “Local solutions for local problems, and the need for a catchment-based approach”.

If a Labour Government was to be voted in at the next general election, Emma confirmed that it is not their intention to carry out wholesale changes to the flood risk management system, but instead, more effectively use the organisations we have with the wealth of experience, knowledge, and expertise that they have. Emma wants to be more pro-active in bringing the relevant people together before critical events such as floods happen, to allow for collective thought and co-ordination on adaptation, resilience, and planning for adverse climatic events. To that end, Labour are considering the creation of a strategic group comprising of the major industry players, relevant civil servants, and politicians. The aim of this task-force would be to have oversight and understanding of what is happening and what is at risk. The task-force would provide accountability for progress on flood prevention in areas at risk before floods take place.

Importantly, Emma announced that Labour would plan to create a new post of Minister of Resilience within the Cabinet Office, and they would have responsibility for the strategic task-force.

Emma went on to make mention of the recent National Audit Office (NAO) report on flooding. She was unequivocal that “there’s an incredibly strong argument to look at why it is we’re investing so much in capital and why we are not putting the money into maintaining what we already have”. Finishing on this important subject, she said that a Labour Government would commit to looking at the balance of spending between capital and revenue, better understanding how to manage and maintain all the flood risk assets we already have, and in sustainable way which improves and enhances our environment.

It was clear that the audience appreciated Emma’s passion and understanding of the flood risk issues facing people, businesses, and the

environment.

Emma took questions from the audience relating to: special levy and pressures on local council finances; the lack of routine management of main rivers in the Lower Trent catchment having major knock-on impacts upon local communities, IDBs, and local councils; critical national infrastructure; and the administrative burden of gaining regulatory permissions to carry out flood risk management works.

Adriano Battilani

Our second speaker was Adriano Battilani who is the General Secretary of Irriganti d’Europe and a technical advisor to the President of the Association of Italian Drainage & Irrigation Boards (ANBI).

Adriano gave delegates an insight into the challenges facing Italy in terms of both flood and drought risk. He explained how ANBI’s members were taking a pro-active approach to plan for a more adaptive and resilient future.

Having just celebrated 100 years in existence, ANBI’s consortia manage 19 million hectares, which is about 64% of the land area of Italy, and around 231,000km of canals.

Adriano went on to explain that, linked to a changing climate, urban pressures and water demand is affecting Italy’s ability to produce food. Saline intrusion is a major problem, especially in the very fertile delta of the River Po in northern Italy.

What was clear from Adriano’s presentation was the forward-looking, innovative approach the Italians are taking to re-using wastewater, the management of soils, and careful progress towards carbon neutrality through the water-energy-food nexus. Much thought is being given to energy production, principally using hydro, solar, and hydrogen, but recognising that hydrogen production is itself both energy and water resource hungry. All this is set against environmental targets and the aim to reach carbon net zero by 2030.

Adriano’s presentation was accompanied by a series of highly informative slides expressing not only the interconnections between a wide range of criteria, but also the need to “disentangle/ disconnect” certain aspects. The clear messages to delegates were ones of challenge, future planning, innovation, and opportunity in water management by doing things differently.

Lisa Pinney MBE

Lisa Pinney, Chief Executive, The Coal Authority concluded our first session by giving a fascinating overview of the the Authority’s work

managing the legacy of the UK’s mining industry – not just coal, but all other forms of mining as well. Lisa explained the various roles the Coal Authority undertakes in providing a 24/7 service covering all aspects of dealing with water and water pollution, but also around mining subsidence and its impact upon land drainage, people’s homes, and under infrastructure, roads, railways, etc. She explained that The Coal Authority is sponsored by the Department of Energy & Net Zero (DESNZ), but whilst most of the liabilities sit with DESNZ, nearly all of impacts are closely involved with Defra and its associated bodies and partners.

The biggest issue in this regard affecting internal drainage boards is subsidence, and the Coal Authority works closely with IDBs, the Environment Agency and local authorities to pump water from affected areas. Lisa is keen to work in collaboration with others to find innovative ways to deal with problems in a sustainable, cost-effective way over the longer term. For example, perhaps through the consolidation of pumping stations to reduce longer term costs and provide greater resilience. Lisa went on to explain that The Coal Authority supports the operation of around 80 pumping stations across North Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, over a subsidence-affected area of about 88,000 hectares. Much of this area comes under the rules and regulations of the Doncaster Drainage Act 1929.

Lisa was very supportive of the need for maintaining and managing key watercourses, making positive reference to a well-maintained IDB ditch near Fishlake, which performed very well during Storm Babet.

Lisa commented on other areas of Coal Authority innovation such as the natural treatment of contaminated minewater, and the use of water from deeper mines to produce energy for community heating schemes. She finished her presentation by stressing the importance of working together with partners, in order to plan forward to innovate and find solutions to the various issues faced.

Alan Lovell DL

Speaking to an ADA audience for the first time since becoming Chair of the Environment Agency (EA), Alan Lovell gave a particularly well-targeted presentation to Conference, covering an update on the recent storms and resulting flooding, maintenance, capital flooding and de-maining.





Following the recent NAO announcements, Alan confirmed that the EA is working on a reset of its spending plans for this current spending review period, accepting that the original houses-protected targets set for delivery by 2027 were out of reach. He reported that the recent storms Babet and Ciaran had broken a large number of records, with 168 rivers exceeding their previous highest recorded levels, and record levels of flood warnings issued in parallel. Over 2,300 properties were flooded, but Alan was pleased to report that flood defences in place had helped to protect over 139,000 properties that might have otherwise been flooded.

Alan went on to mention the benefit of maintenance. He highlighted that currently for every £1 spent, there is £11 back in benefit to the country, and he recognised *“the importance of getting maintenance right, if necessary at the expense of capital.”*

Alan stressed that with the EA’s new Chief Executive, Philip Duffy, both of them would be looking closely at the balance of spending between capital and revenue, doing their best to influence HM Treasury thinking on this matter. Alan also recognised that main river conveyance remains a significant issue for many. He invited delegates to flag up issues where they felt that the EA are not giving enough consideration to the local problems.

Alan offered up his regrets that the EA had not worked more quickly to reach decisions on the future of the capital programme in the light of inflationary and other pressures, and he appreciated the negative effects this was having on the work plans for both IDBs and local authorities who were the most affected by the reduced number of flood defence schemes to be funded during the present spending review period.

Alan finished with some good news that the EA will be renewing its interest in possible remaining of certain sections of main river where there is local desire to do so. He acknowledged that the enabling of the Ratings Statutory Instrument being drafted by Defra was a key step in taking this forward, and he will do what he can to assist progress. Alan also confirmed that more work would be done on the area of public sector co-operation. He regarded the EA’s link with ADA as vital and was very happy to commit to a continuing close co-operation with our association.

Ian Titherington

As Senior Advisor on Sustainable Drainage to the Welsh Government, Ian started by explaining how Schedule 3 of the Flood & Water Management Act 2010 had been enabled in Wales in January 2019. Importantly, he went on to highlight the robustness of the legal framework that they now had in place. Put simply, he said *“if you don’t have SuDS Approval Body (SAB) approval in Wales, you cannot build, and the appeals process is very challenging.”*

Ian emphasized that he is working closely with Defra to provide advice on the pros and cons that Wales has experienced with the introduction of SABs, in order to help England arrive more quickly at the necessary operational solutions.

Ian described the six national standards for SuDS in Wales, and then gave a comprehensive view of the multitude of benefits that statutory SuDS can deliver. He said that there was a clear planning hierarchy for SuDS, assisted by a very detailed 900-page SuDS Manual published by Susdrain.

Ian was clear that it is critical to make sure that someone is clearly responsible for the ownership, adoption, and maintenance of a SuDS scheme, ensuring that sufficient money is available. That is exactly, he said, where the SAB plays a key role. The design of good SuDS plays another key part in achieving a sustainable, long-term solution, with a range of benefits to create better places to live and work with high amenity value. Ian highlighted that SuDS are fantastic pollution absorbers, enhancing the quality of water passing forward from them.

Wales have now published a review of the function of SABs so far, with 80 recommendations for where improvements can be made. Ian passionately and enthusiastically concluded by strongly encouraging England to join Wales in taking the next step over the starting line to get Schedule 3 enacted into legislation. He looked forward to returning in a few years to see what good progress has been made.

Julia King, Baroness Brown of Cambridge DBE FREng FRS

As our final speaker of the day, the Chair of the Adaptation Committee of the Committee for Climate Change (CCC), Baroness Brown gave everyone considerable food for thought around our changing climate and the real need for us to adapt and become more resilient to changes.

Julia presented a number of slides with sobering data showing increases in global temperatures, recent UK statistics showing that 2023 was the hottest on record and that average temperatures in Europe are increasing by 0.5 degrees °C every 10 years, double the global average. Estimating that we could see 45 degrees °C in the South-East by mid-century, she said that *“climate change is already baked in”*.

There will also be more winter rainfall leading to more flooding and summer rainfall will become more intense leading to increased surface water flooding. Alongside changing weather conditions will come changing biosecurity hazards with new pests and diseases and we are already seeing some evidence of that.

As well as adapting to flooding, we need to account for increased risk of drought conditions and the need to provide more water storage, for example directly on farms.

Julia highlighted that the most recent CCC climate change risk assessment report published in 2021 identified 61 risks and opportunities, 54 of which were in the highest urgency category. Julia went on to highlight that 8 key priority areas of risk have been identified to help focus attention on actions for further adaptation but the 2023 CCC Progress Report on policies and plans and their delivery and implementation paints a very gloomy picture.

After a very powerful and professional delivery of the science and data driving the current thinking, Julia finished by saying that we have the opportunity to provide a clear vision for the future and that we all must encourage our decision makers to lift their heads and take action.

After the presentations, a question-and-answer session concluded the event. The online SLIDO platform allowed delegates to ask a stream of over twenty interesting questions to the assembled panel of speakers, chaired by Robert Caudwell. Full details of all the questions and answers provided can be found, along with copies of all the presentation slides from each of the speakers via www.ada.org.uk/ada-conference.

Our thanks to Wilkin Chapman LLP solicitors for both their generous sponsorship of this year’s Conference and continued support in updating ADA’s Good Governance Guide for IDB Members, which we look forward to publishing in the new year.