



Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3 JR

Friday 8th January 2016

Dear Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP,

We are writing as the UK's Green MEPs to urge the UK Government to immediately make an application for funds to be mobilised from the EU's Solidarity Fund in order to support the reparation of damage caused by floods across the country this winter.

The European Solidarity Fund is available to EU Member States struck by major national disasters and has already been called upon for 70 disasters across the EU. During the floods of 2007, the UK received £120m from this fund to help with the damage that was caused to 48,000 homes and 7,000 businesses in the south west of England, the Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside.

The European Commission has given its assurances that funds would be available for the UK to apply to support the rebuilding of energy, water, waste and transport infrastructure, telecommunications and the provision of rescue services and temporary accommodation to those who have had to evacuate their properties.

We fail to see why the Government has not already made an application for funds to help those suffering from the floods in this time of need – and ask that you provide an explanation for this.

An application must be made within 10 weeks after the initial damage caused by the disaster, and we are fast approaching this deadline. It is urgent that the Government take action to apply for this money before this option is retracted.

The UK has been hit by serious flooding on multiple occasions over the last decade, and it is likely that we can expect more of this kind of extreme weather in the future. In the wake of COP21, we recall that exceptionally high levels of rainfall are a product of worsening climate change. Therefore, the UK's response to flooding must necessarily be founded upon coherent efforts to combat climate change, supporting industries such as renewables which are vital in fulfilling our commitments.

We must ensure that we have adequate flood defence systems in place, in particular back-to-natural flood reduction schemes and river restoration as proposed by the Chartered Institute of Water and Environment Management (CIWEM). Further to this, the Government should seriously consider an application for funding through the EU Regional Development Fund to establish effective flood prevention measures.

Conventional flood defences, like flood walls and dredging, can be a costly and risky solution to flood management. In some cases, flood walls and channels protect only those areas in direct proximity to the wall while causing further flooding to properties downstream. We need investment in other more effective flood management strategies on top of traditional methods.

Agriculture plays an important role in this picture. We urgently need to consider how our past and current farming practices have reduced the land's ability to absorb rainfall for longer before it drains into the river. Misguided approaches including the use of chemical inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides can significantly decrease the health and diversity of soil and, as a result, its flood and drought resilience.

Farmers should be incentivised to incorporate flood mitigation and adaptation practices on the land they farm. This includes solid cross-compliance obligations that ensure all farmers incorporate flood-resilience into their everyday practices, but also building on the existing integrated catchment-level approaches already being enacted in line with the Water Framework Directive (WFD), and indeed anticipating the incorporation of relevant farm-level rules from WFD into cross-compliance.

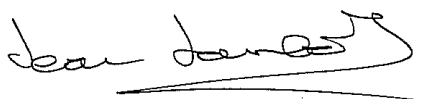
Further, the Rural Development Programme's Entry-Level Scheme previously provided crucial incentive for UK farmers to invest in agri-environmental measures, notably to restore the healthy, living soil that is key to a flood-resistant agricultural system. Adequate government funding should again be allocated to this scheme, which previously enjoyed participation of over 70% of farmers, and therefore had the broad potential to bring agri-environmental measures to mainstream farming. This would benefit both farmers and their communities, yet farmers clearly require support to invest in making certain changes in land management that imply additional costs.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience on the urgent steps the UK Government is taking to mobilise EU Solidarity funds to aid the UK's flood rescue and reparations - funds which were set up for this kind of purpose.

Yours sincerely,



Keith Taylor, Green MEP, South East England.



Jean Lambert - Green Party MEP, London



Molly Scott Cato - Green Party MEP, South West