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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE**

Hugh Bayley MP  
House of Commons  
LONDON  
SW1A 0AA

14 April 2014

Dear Mr Bayley

**GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON FLOOD DEFENCES AND THE SCOPE OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS**

Thank you for your letter dated 28 February, further to my reply to you dated 19 February, regarding Government spending on flood defences in England.

You asked me about the outcome of the Authority's discussions with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in respect of the publication of official statistics on Government spending on flood defences in England. I can confirm that the Statistics Authority's Head of Assessment has been actively discussing this matter with the Head of Profession for Statistics and others at Defra, and I expect this to continue at pace until we have achieved an outcome which is satisfactory to us.

You have also raised two related questions in correspondence with Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair of the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, to which the Authority most routinely reports in Parliament:

- whether there should be a Code of Practice for numerical information that is not presently designated as 'official statistics'?
- whether the UK Statistics Authority should have the statutory responsibility to designate numerical information produced by departments as 'official statistics'?

To take the second question first – Section 6 of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* does not give the Authority the statutory responsibility for defining whether numerical information produced by such bodies is an 'official statistic' or not. The Authority is therefore able to advocate that statistics should be recognised as official statistics, and has been active in doing so, but we do not have statutory power to require this of Departments.

Reflecting this situation, the Authority has published guidance<sup>1</sup> on the circumstances under which we will regard numerical information and research data as official statistics, and therefore where we expect these to be produced in accordance with the Code of Practice. The Authority has, on a number of occasions, advised publicly when, in our view, numerical information should in future be treated as official statistics, and where the treatment of numerical information appears to conflict with the standards expressed in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/statement---management-information-and-research-data-as-official-statistics---21032011.pdf>

But we do not think that this position is ideal. Instead, we consider that there are strong arguments for the Authority to be given responsibility for determining the scope of the definition of 'official statistics'. We would welcome all opportunities to engage with Government and Parliament in this regard.

Returning to your first question, we are presently not attracted to a separate Code of Practice for non-official statistics. We consider that whenever a Department issues numerical information, it should have regard to the principles of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics - quality, transparency, accessibility, impartiality, and objectivity – whether or not the information is formally recognised as official statistics. I would also expect that where information is not official statistics, departments can also explain the standards that have applied to the data, for example, financial reporting standards or research ethics. But we would be concerned that creating a separate Code of Practice for non-official statistics would, in effect, create a two-speed system, with all the attendant risks of arbitrage as some departments sought to escape the main Code and to comply with what they would no doubt see as the less onerous requirements of a non-official statistics code. For this reason, our clear preference is to extend the principles of the current statutory Code of Practice for Official Statistics to cover a very wide range of numerical releases.

I am copying this to the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Rt. Hon. Francis Maude MP, to the Chair of the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, Bernard Jenkin MP, to the Permanent Secretary to Defra, Bronwyn Hill, to the National Statistician, Jil Matheson, and to the Authority's Head of Assessment, Ed Humpherson.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE**



## Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)

Committee · Office · House of Commons · 7 Millbank · London SW1P 3JA  
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Sir Andrew Dilnot  
Chair, UK Statistics Authority  
1 Drummond Gate  
London  
SW1V 2QQ

12<sup>th</sup> March 2014

*Sir Andrew*

You were copied into a letter to me from Hugh Bayley MP, dated 28 February 2014, about flood defence spending figures, with two suggestions which relate to your work. Firstly, that there could be a Code of Practice for non-official statistics, and second, that UKSA should have the power to designate departmental statistics as official statistics. I would be interested in your views on the matters raised by Mr Bayley, and your view on the extent to which UKSA should proactively suggest to departments that data should be treated as official statistics.

I am copying this letter to Hugh Bayley MP. I look forward to hearing from you.

*Dear Minister*

*Bernard Jenkin*

Bernard Jenkin MP  
Chairman of PASC

cc Hugh Bayley MP

Hugh Bayley MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE  
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority  
1 Drummond Gate  
London  
SW1V 2QQ

28 February, 2014

Dear Andrew,

**GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON FLOOD DEFENCES IN ENGLAND**

Thank you for your reply dated 19 February, 2014 to my letter of 22 January, 2014. I am grateful for your clear advice.

You may have been told that I referred to your letter in a debate in the House of Commons on Wednesday, 26 February.

I am particularly interested in the question you raised in the penultimate paragraph of your letter – whether figures on flood defence spending should, in future, be published as official statistics. I believe they should. You will be aware that I received significantly different figures from DEFRA in answer to very similar Parliamentary Questions tabled in July 2013 and January 2014. During the debate I learned that Chris Ruane had also asked a similar PQ towards the end of last year and the figures he received were different again. It would be helpful to the public and MPs if we received consistent and quality assured figures in a matter of such great public interest. I should be grateful if you would let me know the outcome of the Authority's discussion with the Department on this matter.

You have, rightly raised an important policy issue, which I in turn have raised with the Chair of the Public Administration Select Committee. I enclose a copy of my letter to Bernard Jenkin MP.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hugh Bayley', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Hugh Bayley  
MP for York Central

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Bernard Jenkin MP  
Chair  
Public Administration Select Committee  
House of Commons  
First Floor, Committee Office  
7 Millbank  
London  
SW1P 3JA

28 February, 2014

Dear Bernard,

**UK Statistics Authority**

Thank you for talking with me on Thursday.

I wrote to the UK Statistics Authority in January to seek advice about the reliability of figures about spending on flood defence which have been given to me by DEFRA in answer to Parliamentary Questions. I enclose a copy of the reply which I received last week from Sir Andrew Dilnot, the Authority's Chair.

I do not expect your committee to look into the questions which I put to the UK Statistics Authority. The Authority itself has answered those queries.

I would, however, like your committee to consider the wider policy issue which Sir Andrew raises in the penultimate paragraph of his letter.

He makes two points: that DEFRA's figures on flood defence spending are not official statistics, prepared in compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics; and "given the salience of these figures and the public interest in them, it is my view that it would better serve the public good if DEFRA were to consider publishing official statistics on expenditure by the relevant organisation on aspects of flooding and coastal erosion management in future."

Of course all government departments publish data on many matters which are not covered by official statistics and will doubtless continue to do so. The policy issues, thrown up by this example, which your committee may wish to examine as part of some future enquiry, are:

- 1) Should there be a Code of Practice, similar to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics to set quality assurance standards for statistics published by government departments, which are not classified as official statistics and therefore overseen and quality – assured by the UK Statistics Authority.

- 2) Should the UK Statistics Authority have the power to designate departmental statistics as official statistics – and thereby take over the quality assurance and publication of those statistics – in cases like this one, where the Authority believe there is a “public interest” in the figures in question being prepared in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority’s more exacting standards.

I should be grateful if you would circulate this letter to the members of your committee and let me know the response.

I am copying this letter to Sir Andrew Dilnot and to the Clerk of the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Hugh Bayley  
MP for York Central

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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE**

Hugh Bayley MP  
House of Commons  
LONDON  
SW1A 0AA

19 February 2014

Dear Mr Bayley

**GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON FLOOD DEFENCES IN ENGLAND**

Thank you for your letter to Jil Matheson dated 22 January 2014, regarding figures about government spending on flood defences in England. I am replying as Chair of the UK Statistics Authority.

The Statistics Authority has reviewed the figures provided to you in a written answer of 15 July 2013<sup>1</sup>, the oral statement to which you refer provided by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 9 January 2014<sup>2</sup>, and the revised figures provided to you in a written answer of 15 January 2014<sup>3</sup>.

The Statistics Authority's own analysis of the available figures concurs with the conclusions of the note prepared for you by officials in the House of Commons, attached to your letter and subsequently reproduced in a published analytical article<sup>4</sup>. We agree with their finding that, as at January 2014, Government funding for flood defences was expected to be lower in both nominal and real terms during the current spending period than during the last spending period. Our analysis also supports the conclusion that the statement "over the current spending review period, more is being spent [on flood defences] than ever before"<sup>5</sup> is supported by the statistics if the comparison is made in nominal terms and includes external funding, but it is not supported by the statistics if the comparison is made in real terms, or if external funding is excluded.

Turning to your question about the reasons why the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) revised its estimates of spending on flood defences, the Statistics Authority has made enquiries with Defra on this point. Defra did not provide us with any further information on this, beyond the explanation provided to you in the written answer of 15 January 2014.

Defra does not publish figures on flood defence spending as official statistics. There is therefore no obligation for Defra to comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics in relation to these figures. However, given the salience of these figures and the public interest in them, it is my view

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<sup>1</sup> [HC Deb, 10 July 2013, c478W](#)

<sup>2</sup> [HC Deb, 9 January 2014, c440](#)

<sup>3</sup> [HC Deb, 15 January 2014, c604W](#)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05755.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [HC Deb, 6 January 2014, c25](#)

that it would better serve the public good if Defra were to consider publishing official statistics on expenditure by the relevant organisations on aspects of flooding and coastal erosion management in future. I have asked the Authority's Head of Assessment to explore this matter further with the Department.

I am copying this reply to Rt. Hon. Owen Paterson MP, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Bronwyn Hill CBE, the Permanent Secretary at Defra; Jil Matheson, the National Statistician; Ed Humpherson, the Authority's Head of Assessment; and to John Pullinger, Director General of Information Services at the House of Commons.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE**





HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ms Jil Matheson  
National Statistician  
UK Statistics Authority  
1 Drummond Gate  
London  
SW1V 2QQ

22 January 2014

Dear Ms Matheson,

**Government Spending on Flood Defences**

I should like your advice about the statistical validity of the figures about government spending on flood defences which I received in a number of recent answers from DEFRA. I enclose copies of each of the questions and answers.

On 15 July 2013 in a written answer I was given a table of figures on “DEFRA funding for flood defences” which I understood to show a reduction in expenditure from a peak of £646 million in 2010-11 to £533 million in the current year.

In the House on 9 January 2014 the DEFRA Secretary of State claimed (in relation to flood defences) that “the Government are spending more in this spending round than was spent by the previous Government” (Hansard, col. 430). Later that day I reminded the Secretary of State of his department’s answer on 15 July and asked him to clarify his earlier statement. He repeated that “..... this Government are providing more than any previous Government in the current spending review.”

I therefore tabled a further question, answered by the DEFRA Parliamentary Under-Secretary on 15 January 2014. This answer revised the figures given in the earlier answer, and sought to justify the Secretary of State’s claim in the House by arguing Government spending “together with external contributions” is rising.

I should be grateful for your advice on the following points:

1. Can you explain the reasons why the Department revised the figures given in July 2013? I see the earlier answer refers to “DEFRA funding for flood defences” while the second appears to relate to “flood and coastal erosion”. Is this the reason for the discrepancy? Would you comment please on the validity of each set of figures?

2. The more recent figures appear to include £148 million of external funding over the four year period 2011-15. Is this funding guaranteed; how much has been received and spent on flood defences to date; and is it accurate for DEFRA to describe external funding as "Government" spending, to use the Secretary of State's words in the House?

3. The Secretary of State clearly wishes to give the impression that funding for flood protection is increasing but it seems to me that this claim does not stand up if you compare current spending (even on his recently revised figures) of £577 million with the figures spent in the last full year of the previous Government (£633 million), or the first year of the current Government (£670 million). Nor does the claim stand up if you compare the actual spend in the first three years by the current Government with spending over the last three years of the previous Government. In which case, is it accurate for the Secretary of State to claim, in answer to my oral question on 9 January 2014, that "this Government are providing more than any previous Government ....."? The use of the word "are" relates to the present, of course, not the future.

4. I asked a statistician in the House of Commons Library to read the most recent written answer and offer advice. I enclose this. You will see that he concludes that "Department spending on flood defences in 2011-15 will be lower than it was in 2007-11 in both nominal and real terms." Do you agree with this conclusion?

I should also be grateful for advice about how it would be possible to ensure that Government answers involving figures are both objective and accurate. Are there guidelines, or a code of practice, which Ministers and civil servants are supposed to follow, and if so have they been followed rigorously in this case?

Yours sincerely,



Hugh Bayley MP

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House of Commons

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 July 2013

Flood Control

**Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much his Department has spent on flood protection measures in (a) England, (b) Yorkshire and the Humber and (c) the City of York council area in each year since 1995-96. [163867]

**Richard Benyon:** The following table shows spending by DEFRA on flood protection in England since 1996.

	<i>Total (£ million)</i>
1996-97	102
1997-98	87
1998-99	78
1999-2000	76
2000-01	72
2001-02	85
2002-03	128
2003-04	136
2004-05	415
2005-06	515
2006-07	505
2007-08	457
2008-09	566
2009-10	620
2010-11	646
2011-12	548
2012-13	523
2013-14	533

The following table shows the total expenditure of the Yorkshire Regional Flood Defence Committee and specifically on the City of York. Prior to 2004-05 grants were provided through a system of central Government grants to individual local authorities.

<i>£000</i>			
		<i>City of York</i>	
	<i>Yorkshire Regional Flood Defence Committee<sup>(1)</sup></i>	<i>Capital</i>	<i>Revenue</i>
2000-01	28,578	0	<sup>(2)</sup> 582
2001-02	30,715	0	<sup>(2)</sup> 675
2002-03	41,548	56	<sup>(2)</sup> 768
2003-04	37,330	130	780
2004-05	33,421	0	750
2005-06	40,684	120	830
2006-07	34,015	110	650
2007-08	35,174	24	663
2008-09	41,791	56	676
2009-10	57,704	53	641
2010-11	48,645	132	342
2011-12	42,376	194	192
2012-13	39,413	747	224

<sup>(1)</sup> Total spend for Yorkshire and north bank of Humber (including York).<sup>(2)</sup> Prior to 2003 figures are based on the management area in which York is based, the Ouse.

## House of Commons

### Oral Answers to Questions

*Thursday 9 January 2014*

**Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab):** Will the Secretary of State clarify his earlier statement about an increase in his Department's funding for flood protection? During the second half of last year, the hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who was then a DEFRA Minister, told me in a written parliamentary answer that in the year in which his party came to power, the Department spent £646 million. Spending in the current year is £113 million less, at £533 million. Did the Secretary of State's earlier statement mean that the Government have now increased funding for flood protection in this and future years, and does that mean that he can now abandon the proposals to cut 1,700 jobs at the Environment Agency?

**Mr Paterson:** I know that those in the Labour Whips Office struggle with slow learners, but I shall put it on the record again: this Government are providing more than any previous Government in the current spending review. We are spending £2.3 billion, which is in addition to £148 million of partnership money. Exceptionally, the present Government have a £2.3 billion programme of capital spending up to 2021. Will Labour Members please ask those on their Front Bench to endorse that spending programme?

## DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

## PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

Named Day

Date: 15 January 2013

**Hugh Bayley** (York Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 15 July 2013, Official Report, columns 478-9W, on flood control, and his oral Answer to the hon. Member for York Central of 9 January 2014, for what reasons the earlier answer shows that his Department's spending on flood protection in England fell from £646 million in 2010-11 to £533 million in 2013-14 when his oral Answer on his Department's spending on flood protection states that he is providing more money for this purpose than any previous Government in the current spending review; how the £2.3 billion figure in his oral Answer relates to the £646 million and £533 million figures in the answer of 15 July 2013; how the figure of £2.3 billion was calculated; over what period the £2.3 billion will be spent; and what the evidential basis is for the statement that the current Government is providing more than any previous Government on flood protection. [182589]

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**Dan Rogerson**

Holding Reply sent 14 January

Together with external contributions under this Government's Partnership Funding approach, more is being spent on flood and coastal erosion risk management during the current Spending Review period (2011/12 to 2014/15) than in the previous four years (2007/08 to 2010/11).

The supporting information for this calculation is set out below.

I would also like to take this opportunity to correct the record. Floods funding is complex, with a number of different income streams including Government funding, local levies, and other contributions towards schemes. Further analysis has identified some minor inconsistencies in the figures previously provided on historic Government spending on flood risk management, including in the Written Answer referred to by the Hon. Member. I regret that this was not presented in a consistent way, something I have now rectified.

Government expenditure on flood risk management

The figures below set out Defra expenditure on flood risk management, including through grant-in-aid provided to the Environment Agency for this purpose. They exclude funding through local levies or other income.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total (£m)</b>
2007/08	500
2008/09	568
2009/10	633
2010/11	670
2011/12	573
2012/13	576

Future budgets for flood and coastal erosion risk management

The figures below set out current budgets, calculated on the same basis.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total (£m)</b>
2013/14	577
2014/15	615

Expenditure on flood and coastal erosion risk management during the four-year period from 2007/08 to 2010/11 totalled £2.371 billion. Expenditure already incurred, and planned, during the current Spending Review period (2011/12 to 2014/15) totals £2.341 billion.

Funding from external sources spent during the four-year period from 2007/08 to 2010/11 totalled £13m. For the current Spending Review period, funding from external contributions under our new Partnership Funding approach are expected to total up to £148m.

Taken together, more is therefore being spent on flood risk management than ever before.