
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 2013¹, the oral statement to which you refer provided by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 9 January 2014², and the revised figures provided to you in a written answer of 15 January 2014³.

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 article⁴. 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"⁵ 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

¹ [HC Deb, 10 July 2013, c478W](#)

² [HC Deb, 9 January 2014, c440](#)

³ [HC Deb, 15 January 2014, c604W](#)

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

⁵ [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