

Media News

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Embargo: None

Sustainable flood management good for people and biodiversity

Welcome for new Flooding Bill

RSPB Scotland and WWF Scotland welcome the new Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill, which was passed by the Scottish Parliament today (Wednesday 13 May).

Climate change, drier summers and increased stormy weather in the summer months is likely to mean that traditional approaches to flooding will no longer work. The new Bill should see a more co-ordinated approach across Scotland, with a commitment to sustainable flood management measures.

A truly sustainable approach to flood management could relieve pressure on towns and cities by using the natural capacity of rivers and coasts to reduce flood risk, rather than simply building concrete barriers in towns to resist flooding. This approach could create some fantastic wetland habitat for wildlife whilst helping to protect people and communities from flooding - a true win-win situation.

RSPB Scotland's Freshwater Policy Officer Andrea Johnstonova said:

"This legislation should place Scotland at the forefront of implementing a modern and sustainable approach to flooding in Europe. The challenge ahead will be to ensure that we move swiftly to implement this new approach with adequate funding, and to make sure that relevant bodies work together efficiently to make sustainable flood management work.

Dr Dan Barlow, Head of Policy at WWF Scotland said:

"We are delighted that the Scottish Parliament has today passed this progressive flooding Bill. Focusing on a catchment approach and emphasising the role of natural techniques in flood management will ensure that we deal with the causes not just the consequences of flooding."

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For more information/interviews/images, please contact RSPB Scotland's National Media Officer Davey Fitch on 0131 311 6500/07894 173 116.

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Notes

The Scottish Parliament voted this afternoon, 13 May 2009, to pass the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill.

Traditional approaches to defending against flooding are governed by the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961. It promotes engineering methods to flood prevention, such as building floodwalls, embankments and large concrete culverts. However, these 'hard engineering' solutions merely move water downstream faster, creating flood problems elsewhere. In future, floods will become more extreme, and this approach will no longer work - as building higher floodwalls and embankments will become unsustainable.

In contrast, 'natural flood management' techniques - such as allowing natural floodplains to do their job and creating wetland habitats - means letting the land act like a giant sponge to soak up excess water and release it slowly back into rivers.

The UK Climate Impacts Programme (CIP) briefing concludes that winters will become wetter, with increases in rainfall intensity and frequency, while summers may become drier. Therefore floods, which are currently considered 'extreme' will become more common in the future. The report states that by 2080, winter precipitation in the west of Scotland could increase by 20%, and in parts of the east of Scotland the increase could be as much as 30%. A medium climate change scenario predicts that a 1 in 100 chance flood in any year is expected to become a 1 in 70 chance flood in any year by the 2020s, and to a 1 in 40-60 chance flood in any year by the 2080s