

LETTER TO THE GUARDIAN 01-11-2021 (Dr Mark Roberts)

Revealed: A Third of England's vital flood defences are in private hands <https://www.theguardian.com/uk>

Dear Sir/Madam,

As you reported today ("Revealed: a third of England's vital flood defences are in private hands"), the Environment Agency have limited powers to enforce maintenance of privately owned flood defences. There is a further category of largely privately owned infrastructure which has large potential to reduce flood risk, reservoirs owned by our water companies. It is acknowledged that provision of storm space in reservoirs can provide flood risk reduction to communities living with the risk of flooding. For example, the flood risk to the town of Keswick in Cumbria is significantly reduced when there is space in the upstream Thirlmere reservoir.

Water companies are focused on provision of supplies to their customers and avoidance of drought measures, both of which are backed by legislation. Flood risk does not have the same priority for them, and the EA currently does not have power to require any actions.

The EA has recently completed a national review of reservoirs, in which their role in flood risk reduction was assessed. That report has not yet been released to the public and may not be as it has been categorised as a DEFRA internal document to inform policy.

With climate change increasing the severity of storms and flooding events, it is vital that the role of existing reservoir infrastructure is included in flood risk reduction going forward.

Yours respectfully,

Dr Mark Roberts

01-11-2021