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From the Minister for the Environment  
Phil Woolas MP

Thank you for your letter of 27 May in regard to my letter to you of 23 April. I recognise the significance of the risk of flooding to the Norfolk coastline and I have noted your views from your letter and the previous one of 8 April. It is regrettable that anxiety has been raised by the media representation of Natural England's report. However, it is important to understand that Natural England is not the cause of flood risk in the Broads. I explained in my previous letter that decisions about the management of flood risk in the Broads will be taken by all the relevant operating authorities, led by the Environment Agency and local authorities, and subject to an appropriate level of public consultation. I would encourage you to make representations to those bodies when the Shoreline Management Plan comes up for review through the usual stakeholder engagement processes.

It would not be appropriate for me to instruct Natural England to remove the assessment of the impact of flooding from its report. Indeed, the appraisal of the impacts of flooding on the natural environment of the Broads is likely to provide evidence to support the case for maintaining defences. It may help to explain that it is normal appraisal practice to assess the damages of doing nothing in order to elucidate the benefits of doing something. This is necessary to justify continued public investment in flood defences.

The Natural England report is intended to elaborate on the environmental impacts of a wide range of options in the light of climate change to inform, not define, the best way to manage flood risk in the future. I understand that Natural England has recently met with representatives from some of Norfolk's parish councils, along with the Environment Agency, to discuss the report on the effects of climate change on the Broads. I hope this will help to allay your concerns.

PHIL WOOLAS