

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for Infrastructure

'REVIEW OF WINTER FLOODING (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2015-16'

Published at 12.00 noon on Monday 5 December 2016.

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): On this date last year 'Desmond', the first of the significant named rain storms, was causing havoc across the north. Numerous other winter storms, most notably, Eva, and Frank followed, making last winter the wettest on record. Flooding was widespread in the Foyle, Erne and Neagh Bann catchments and this demanded exceptional effort from many people including those involved in the multi-agency response, businesses and homeowners. I cannot speak highly enough about the resilience of those impacted, as the flood events seemed never ending in comparison with previous years. I also need to recognise the negative impact these floods caused to users of the road and rail network, farms and businesses, and in particular those in Linen Green, Moygashel and Kinnego Marina.

Following the floods Michelle O'Neill, the then Minister with responsibility for flood risk management, asked Alan Strong to carry out a review. Alan is the current chairman of the Drainage Council, a visiting professor in civil engineering with the University of Ulster and a well respected civil engineer. Alan's review has captured evidence from an exceptionally wide range of people including those involved with the recovery and future planning for such events. This evidence, his commendations, and recommendations for improvements in the area of flood risk management are included in the report which I am making public today. I welcome this piece of work as it is clearly well informed, wide ranging and challenging. The report uses the theme of resilience throughout and focuses on a number of sectors such as farmers, staff and land use. Importantly, the report highlights that flooding is not something that can be solved but is a reality that we must learn to live with and manage. This will be particularly challenging given the predictions for climate change which indicate that we should expect more rainfall and storms in the years to come.

I am proud of our collective efforts to weather last winter's storms and I plan to build on this success to make our communities more resilient going forward. We all need to read Alan's report and then work together to implement the recommendations, so that we are even more prepared for future storms.

The report on 'Review of Winter Flooding' (Northern Ireland) 2015-2016 will be available at the link below from 12:00 Noon on Monday 5 December 2016.

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/alan-strongs-report-review-winter-flooding-northern-ireland-2015-2016>