



Ministry of Housing,
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Dear *Ann*

30th October 2025

In the Report Stage for the Planning and Infrastructure Bill on 21 October 2025, you asked about the Reservoirs Act 1975 and what is happening to implement the recommendations of the 2021 Independent Reservoir Safety Review (Balmforth Review) which followed the Toddbrook reservoir incident in 2019. In particular you asked about the timescale for reforms. I said I would write to you about this.

As I mentioned in the debate, the Government is intending to consult on reforms to reservoir safety regulation. Reservoir safety regulation is about the structural safety of raised reservoirs, and preventing the uncontrolled release of water from the reservoir, which could cause devastating loss of life, damage and disruption to homes, businesses, infrastructure, and communities downstream.

Following the completion earlier this year of [research on the development of a new hazard classification system](#) and improved safety management practices, the UK and Welsh governments plan to launch a public consultation shortly on proposals to improve the whole safety regime and modernise the legal framework. This is with a view to secondary legislation being brought forward in 2027/8, which would update the regulatory system currently set out in the Reservoirs Act 1975.

The research project developed options for a new hazard classification system and has proposed a system which has four classes related to level of hazard. The current classification system is limited to 'high risk' and 'not high risk' categories. All reservoirs designated as high risk have the same regulatory requirements, even though they can be very different in size, type and the population at risk. The high risk/not high risk classification does not result in a sufficiently proportionate approach to regulation because the majority (about 84% in England and Wales) of registered reservoirs are classified as high risk. In the proposed new system, the current approach would be replaced with a system comprised of four hazard classes from Class 1 (highest risk) to Class 4 (lowest risk). Safety management practices and level of regulation would be tailored to each hazard class. Implementing a new classification system would allow reservoirs to be graded by level of hazard and risk, and therefore regulated in a more proportionate way than is currently possible. Where the hazard is low, we aim to reduce regulatory burden, in line with the Chancellor's Action Plan.

In your amendment to the Bill, you asked for an assessment of the impact of the current regime. The research we published sets this out, providing baseline estimates of the likely costs and benefits for the options considered for the new classification and safety management system. The assessment particularly considers the impacts for low hazard and high hazard reservoirs. It indicates that a significant redistribution of the current registered reservoir stock is possible, which would enable a more proportionate approach to reservoir safety management to be applied. Broadly speaking, class 1 reservoirs would have additional safety management requirements compared with the current high risk category and class 4 reservoirs would have fewer mandatory requirements than the current regime, with classes 2 and 3 in between. The analysis will be refined later, following consultation and decisions on the new system, to inform an impact assessment to accompany new legislation. The research has informed policy proposals for consultation.

Improving the whole safety regime is a complex task. We believe this timeline gets the balance right between delivering improvements in a timely way, with creating time for proper consultation on technical issues with our stakeholders. The plan allows us to develop the many inter-linked proposals and then deliver changes in a staged way that the reservoir owners and reservoir safety engineers can manage and plan for.

A number of important changes to improve reservoir safety have been made. These include:

- revising, updating and publishing reservoir flood risk maps. These maps are the best current indication of where water is likely to flow in a breach incident, allowing operators and responders to better plan for emergencies;
- creating new guidance for reservoir engineers about conducting safety inspections, supervision, and better reporting practices. Though not currently statutory, this guidance gives engineers steers towards consistently improving their practice, better serving operators, and ultimately protecting the public; and
- creating guidance for reservoir operators about: management of spillways; the information they need to keep about their reservoirs; managing reservoirs in extreme weather; and guidance on reporting reservoir incidents.

Further information about the development work that is being undertaken is available on the Reservoir Safety Reform Programme web page [Reservoir Safety Reforms | Reservoir Safety Reform Programme | Engage Environment Agency](#).

My noble friend Baroness Hayman will arrange a meeting with you to discuss the reservoir safety reforms and your amendment to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill regarding regulation of low hazard reservoirs. I hope that the information above reassures you that progress is being made and low hazard reservoirs are being properly considered.

Yours ever,



BARONESS TAYLOR OF STEVENAGE

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government