

Accepting climate change does not mean managed retreat - The Rt Hon The Lord Deben

Lord Deben started his talk by pointing out that, in the past, government policy had been based only on looking 100 years ahead, ignoring the short term. He was pleased that this is now changing. We don't take that view when mending our houses; we mend things soon before they get worse, that is how we live our lives. He was a home economics politician and, when considering problems, started by thinking, "How would I do it in my own home."

The mood had now changed. The moment was when Chris Smith, the Chairman of the Environment Agency, said that the approach would no longer be top down but one of cooperation. There was not enough money for the state to do everything, so he wanted to do things together.

Now it is about cooperation not diktat. This seems to be reflecting in the operation of government to a large extent with meetings in Cabinet and Whitehall advancing hand in hand compared with 25 years ago.

There are three big issues facing us on climate change and flooding and over the next two months there will be big recommendations about what will be done to deal with flooding

First, Oliver Letwin is asking all the key players who were involved in the flooding events last winter to answer questions, to get at immediate lessons learnt from recent flooding, what might be done in response to avoid a repeat

The phrase 'once in a hundred years' (a Met Office term used for how common or rare an event might be), had been used as a comfort shield, feeling that once a disaster happened it would not reappear for some time. But in fact it means it is a rare event; it could happen in one or more years in succession, or in very closely linked areas. So it was no comfort.

Second, at long last barring any objections, and following EU provisions that require a system based on river management and the river basin, river and flood management will be based on each whole river basin, instead of being divided by county or local authority lines. This is entirely sensible because we can only manage rivers as a whole, so we need management for the river basins.

This should have been done before according to the EU Water Framework Directive but in the UK it was watered down to be a half and half system. Now that there is acceptance of climate change and a certainty of more extreme events, measures will be needed to better protect us and deal with it when things happen. We will have to say very tough things e.g. keep a lot more water in the uplands which means different ways of farming. Lower down there will have to be soft protection such as wash meadows and fields and farmers will need to be compensated for losing their crops. For years the approach has been hard defences, but the effects of those only impact somewhere else down the line. So we have to take a sensible view of nature and natural management.

Third, in the last year, flood response had not involved enough people; a number of people and organisations who could have contributed to the response were not called upon. Response can only be improved if the right people brought in, with the right training. The Government is actually doing this. This is the immediate result of the review.

Looking at 25 years ahead, Defra is drawing up a 25 year plan with Professor Dieter Helm chairing the Natural Capital Committee, to produce a report on Natural Capital, the value of the landscape and natural features and wild life. The British Treasury under the coalition government was the first to say that any major project must be tested against the principle of national capital — treasuries

need things expressed in financial terms and Natural Capital provides the basis for doing this. The plan will be used for planning for flooding for the next 25 years

So the response from the Climate Change Committee **on effects over 100 years** will set out all the measures identified so that all other plans can be fitted into the pattern. To protect us against climate change we need to start thinking beyond direct issues of landscape and rivers to what happens elsewhere. The Paris Agreement has just been signed to keep temperature rise to less than 2%. This is still not really enough. Looking at sea level rise, the Thames Barrier was envisaged to be used three or four times a year; now the barrier is used every week. There will need to be a new barrier but if set too high up the river it will not achieve its purpose and if set too near the mouth it could adversely affect Holland and their defences (Dutch experience and operations are well worth learning lessons from).

So all areas are interconnected in this world- emissions affecting our climate can be from China and the USA and we can affect Europe. There has to be a global effort to find solutions. Yesterday's signature to the Paris Agreement is a landmark; once 51% of those attending the Conference have signed, it becomes International Law.

This all provides the background for the policy era in which the Alde and Ore Association is working. 25 years ago we were all still frustrated by what could be done, the barriers to progress. The fact that things are getting more joined up and there is more cooperation, improves negotiating for the better.

We are still frightened by the force and strength of the sea. Much of the British population is metropolitanised, cocooned from climate extremes as they just need to deal with day to day weather. But for those of us in the country and nearer the sea, we will see and experience climate change first. We are the bellwethers. Our society has to be very noisy, the ones to make the first call, as we have the first sight if what is happening.

So we need to praise voluntary organisations. The Suffolk Coast against Retreat forum (SCAR) makes a common statement because there is a common interest; we begin to understand how dependent we are on our neighbours and how we have all to work together. The lesson over the last number of years is that things have happened because we have been noisy, and that was difficult enough even with a lively MP. The battle to protect Aldeburgh, to stop the sea coming in, was not easy.

We are now helped by EU Directives concentrating on the environment. These have woken government up to things it should have known before and we are beginning to realise that we in the UK do not always know best, to accept that we can learn from others.

Examples include:

We always thought that we had clean beaches but it took EU Directives to show us how bring them up to standards. Now our beaches are of international standard (see twitter Feed @lorddeben).

The Habitats Directive shows that we have to concentrate on protecting the whole ecosystem (we were a country which prided itself on its attitude to nature but needed directives for action).

The Water Framework Directive provides for whole river basin management, enabling things to start being done effectively

It is not all one way traffic; it was the UK which brought cross compliance into agriculture

All of this means that we have, after 25 years, begun to manage things properly.

So we can be very optimistic- OK it will be hard work but we can be successful; previously it seemed like pushing things uphill - we had a long battle to fulfil from beginning to end.

At long last people beginning to understand both Climate Change and the detail of flooding. The disagreement now is not what is happening but what is the best way forward, the best mechanism to deal with the problem.

In government now there are many times that people say that Suffolk, SCAR, and The Alde and Ore are seen to be leaders in this thinking; we are being used as exemplars of how to do things in cooperation.

So we are entering a new era. We have grown up in a world where government would dictate what should be done - but that can no longer be done. The only way to defend against climate change is that all need to do it together. In the Paris agreement, one of the driving forces was the small island states and Bangladesh which pointed out that with a 2 degree rise they would be inundated and cease to exist. Cooperation rather than control will be the key issue. There will be all sorts of argument, but only by agreeing and being bound by international law, will we save planet we have. We no longer live in a world where individual nations can act individually and do their own thing,

In agriculture negotiations, UK had a seat on World Trade Organisation as well as being part of the EU group. The fact is that in negotiations EU and US get together and other country groupings try to secure something for their common interest. But it is the big groups that dictate the general approach. The most difficult things are fisheries and services, both very important to the UK- it has taken the EU and Canada 7 years to reach agreement on trade and that excludes agriculture and services.

Now we have a world in which we have to learn to make practical what philosophers and theologians have worked out as principles - unless we work with our neighbours we lose all sovereignty.

The Alde and Ore Association has shown the need to work for a common view. The Association also passes on that need to connect with neighbours through SCAR, and through SCAR nationally.

For many issues, working with neighbouring areas and countries is vital- for example on protection of migrating birds or from pollution; how do we make it better? It has to be through consensus, working together, instead of the old routes. If we want to clean up rivers or sea pollution, air pollution, we can solve those problems together. The association is a wonderful example of that in action. We can look forward to another 25 years for an exciting and positive organisation.