



All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways

Climate Change

Minutes

Tuesday 14th October 2025

1pm Portcullis House Room Q

Officers Present: Bill Esterson MP,

Members Present: Lisa Smart MP, Baroness Llin Golding, Baroness Jenny Jones

In Attendance: Charlie Norman (IWA), Amy Tillson (IWA), Tom Pollard assistant to Uma Kumaran MP, Susie Mather (Canal and River Trust)

Speakers: Paul Burrows Chief Executive, Middle Level Commissioners) & Adam Comerford (National Hydrology Manager at the Canal & River Trust)

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- Paul Burrows, Chief Executive of the Middle Level Commissioners
- Adam Comerford, National Hydrology Manager at the Canal & River Trust

Summary: This session of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the Waterways focused on the challenges inland waterways face in the context of climate change, funding restriction, and long-term resilience. Both speakers highlighted the critical role inland waterways play in water management, biodiversity, agriculture, and national infrastructure.

Discussion centred on the need for stronger political engagement, better communication of risks, and why waterways should be linked to wider societal priorities such as food security and climate adaptation.

Paul Burrows explained the unique structure and function of the Middle Level Navigations in Cambridgeshire, stressing the strategic importance of the network. He highlighted that the area is wholly man-made and reliant on continuous pumping to remain navigable. Around 95% of the system's water in summer now comes from the River Nene, as rainfall becomes increasingly scarce.



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A recent climate change risk assessment concluded that, without significant intervention, control over the system could be lost within 15 years. He called for national recognition of the infrastructure's importance, going beyond navigation and including agriculture and food risk mitigation.

Adam Comerford detailed impacts of the 2025 drought. This resulted in closure and/or restriction of around 20% of the Trust's 2,000-mile network. It was noted this was the worst drought the Trust had experienced in over twenty years, with reservoir levels becoming extremely low along with extended navigation restrictions.

The Trust's water resource strategy is being revised to account for increased drought risk and the pressure of abstraction licence renewals. As regulators tighten restrictions to protect rivers, he cautioned that canals could be deprioritised.

He went on to outline several risks identified in the Trust's recent climate adaptation report. Calls for greater political engagement and public awareness.

Baroness Jones and Lisa Smart MP called for a more assertive approach in making the case for waterways, highlighting their critical role in food security, biodiversity, and public health. The session concluded with a discussion on public perceptions of drought versus flood, and how best to communicate the need for investment.



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