



Address by Mr. Séan Canney T.D.,
Minister of State for the Office of Public Works
and Flood Relief

‘Be Winter Ready’ Launch

National Emergency Co-ordination Centre
Dublin

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Introduction

I am delighted to join my Ministerial colleagues today to jointly launch the Government's 'Be Winter Ready' campaign.

While the emphasis today is about creating awareness for people and communities to plan and make preparations for the Winter ahead, it is also an opportunity to share with you the Government's investment, plans and preparations to tackle flood risk, which is one of the themes for this year's campaign.

Government Investment to Date

Ireland is more prepared than ever to tackle flood risk from the significant investment being made to tackle flooding. This investment includes:

- the 37 major flood defence schemes completed, as witnessed last Winter provide protection to 7,000 properties.
- a further 5,000 properties being protected from localised flooding through 400 projects completed under the OPW's Minor Works scheme. A further 200 projects are approved for funding.

- 650,000 acres of agricultural land are protected through the programmed maintenance of 11,500 km of river channels by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts.
- Planning Guidelines have prevented building on flood zones since 2009.

Since last Winter, the OPW has accelerated its resources to complete major flood defence schemes. This year there is a record of 12 major schemes at construction and a further 23 at design development stage. These include schemes in Bandon, Crossmolina and Claregalway.

Since last Winter, Dutch experts have benchmarked our approach to flood risk management and concluded that it is in line with international best practice and is well on track.

The Government investment in capital works of €480m since 1995 is yielding significant benefit in terms of protecting 12,000 properties. The economic benefit to the State in terms of damage and losses avoided is estimated at some €1.2 billion.

As well as the security to families and businesses, this investment is yielding positive returns in terms of availability of flood insurance cover that has increased to up to 89% in protected areas.

The OPW and the Department of Finance are continuing to engage, now on a quarterly basis, with Insurance Ireland.

The insurance industry and the State are working jointly to explore further means to increase insurance availability. This year I secured a commitment from the industry to consider the risk it currently associates with demountable defences and the OPW is collating the detailed information sought by the industry to that end.

CFRAM

Feasible flood relief measures have now been identified to provide protection to almost all properties at risk from flooding within at risk areas. The details are set out in 29 draft Flood Risk Management Plans which I have published since July this year for public consultation.

The OPW has and is continuing to work with communities. Nearly 500 public consultation days have been held on the CFRAM Programme. At these events, the CFRAM teams have presented the maps, issues, options and proposed measures for discussion with people, face-to-face, in their own communities. People's views have been taken on board, and have helped form what's now proposed in the draft plans.

The structural measures in the Plans have been taken to outline design and will reduce the time needed to implement the flood defence schemes in the future. In some cases, this may reduce the average time to complete schemes by up to 2 years.

These Plans are a major step forward to help Government make informed investment decisions on flood risk management. The Government's commitment to continue support of flood relief is underlined in the provision of €430 million to Flood Risk Management in the Capital Investment Plan 2016 to 2021.

Annually the allocation for flood defence works will more than double from €45m to €100m per annum.

Interdepartmental Group

The Flood Risk Management Plans emphasise the importance of non-structural measures and supports the whole of Government approach adopted to tackle flood risk management.

I have been chairing the Interdepartmental Flood Policy Co-ordination Group. Just yesterday, the Group's progress report was approved by Government.

The Government noted progress on the broad range of policies and measures being considered including:

- the Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group has agreed to trial lowering lake levels in Lough Allen and consider the benefits of piloting the removal of pinchpoints and dredging the Shannon, as a further commitment to enhance co-ordinated activities by the relevant State Agencies,
- progress with the Government's pilots to inform any future Government measures to support Individual Property Protection, and
- the implementation Plan for the establishment of the National Flood Forecasting Service within Met Éireann over the coming five years has been agreed and work to commence the service has begun.

The Government also agreed yesterday to introduce a once off targeted Voluntary Homeowner Relocation Scheme for those primary residential properties that flooded during last Winter and had flooded in previous years. It is a humanitarian aid scheme that is targeted to ensure affected homeowners have a primary residence.

The Government has also announced that further examination is ongoing by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, OPW and Local Authorities in evaluating on an individual basis if any alternative remedial works can be undertaken to protect those farm buildings that flooded again last Winter in order to inform a scheme for Voluntary Farm Building Relocation.

Conclusion

Government cannot solve all flooding problems overnight and importantly it cannot do it alone. It needs people and communities to play a role and that is the crucial message of today's 'Be Winter Ready' campaign.

Today's launch is focussed on creating awareness with people and communities and providing them with relevant information to support their plans to prepare for flood risk.

I and my colleagues are very happy to support this initiative.