



CRC 17/09

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### **VIPs revisit Gloucestershire farming communities to assess long-term impacts of summer flooding**

Senior figures from the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) and Environment Agency are making a visit to Gloucestershire farms today (Friday 26 June) to see at first-hand how local communities are recovering from the major summer floods experienced in 2007 and 2008.

The visit by CRC Chief Executive Gill Payne and Environment Agency Chairman, Lord Chris Smith is a follow-up to those made by the Government's Rural Advocate Dr Stuart Burgess following the summer floods in both 2007 and 2008. His tours resulted in a series of recommendations on the need to strengthen the rural economy and protect communities from natural disasters, such as floods or animal disease.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Gill Payne said: "Lord Smith and I are visiting areas in Gloucestershire where flooding continues to be a problem, and to listen to local representatives' proposed solutions. In particular, we will be meeting with local farmers to hear directly if the consequences of the floods are still being felt and, if so, what that means for jobs, livelihoods and the wider local economy and for the land.

"The CRC has an important responsibility to ensure that the needs and concerns of rural communities are fully represented to government. Today's visit is very much a part of that and the fact that Lord Smith is joining me demonstrates a determination on the part of the Environment Agency to understand the issues and to see what solutions and measures might be possible."

Environment Agency Chairman, Lord Chris Smith, said: "The Environment Agency is continuing to work with rural communities, building and maintaining defences and combating flood risk wherever we can.

"All of us – Environment Agency, local authorities, farmer and landowners – need to plan ahead for the impact of climate change, which will increase the frequency and severity of flooding in future.

"In Gloucestershire, we are working closely with farmers, the NFU and CLA, offering advice and workshops on how to help reduce flood risk on farmers' land."

In October 2007, Dr Stuart Burgess the Government's Rural Advocate, and Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities, made a 2-day visit to farms in Gloucestershire hit by unprecedented flooding that summer. The devastation of the floods that year, along with the foot and mouth and bluetongue outbreaks, led to the Prime Minister asking the Rural Advocate to prepare a report on how the rural economy could be further strengthened.

A year later, Dr. Burgess made a return visit to the farms affected by the floods, to see the damage that was evident, not just from the flooding in 2007 but also further flooding during the summer of 2008.

**ENDS**

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**Notes to editors:**

1 The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006 following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The role of the CRC is to provide well-informed, independent advice to government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England. We give particular focus to tackling disadvantage and economic underperformance.

We have three key functions:

- Advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- Expert adviser: providing evidence-based, objective advice to government and others; and
- Independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the CRC and its work can be found at: [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk)