

[Power lunch with Barbara Young](#) [1]

Written by [Dr Eamonn Butler](#) [2] | Saturday 8 December 2007



Barbara Young, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, was our guest at a Power Lunch in Westminster this week. She's had a difficult few months dealing with the physical and political results of widespread flooding in the UK - two major inundations in just a few months.

By any standard, the floods were unusually bad - maybe a one in a hundred years event. Though the worry is that they might get more frequent due to climate change. But one in a hundred years events do occur (roughly every hundred years or so, in fact) and you can't necessarily say that they herald a change. A hurricane just a few years back devastated New Orleans, and everyone started talking about climate change. But even in the 1960s, forecasters knew that a hurricane of a certain strength and a certain trajectory would do that. There were plenty of hurricanes over the next forty years, but only one got lucky. A sign of climate change? Hardly. And don't forget that a hurricane devastated Galveston a century earlier.

But if things really are changing, we are in a mess. One of the things that made the floods so devastating was that nobody seems able to take charge. The water companies control the pipes and sewers. Local authorities are in charge of logistics. The Environment Agency has other functions. When there is a national emergency, we could use smoother and more co-ordinated systems.

Meanwhile, the 55,000 flooded houses that are being refurbished after the floods are being restored to - their original condition. Why don't the insurers use it as an opportunity to flood-proof them while they're about it? Maybe it's because Barbara Young's government colleagues have regulated them all senseless.

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[3] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[4] <http://disqus.com>