

## Update on activities of the Panel Engineers Committee

### Context

1. The ICE formed the Panel Engineer's Committee (PEC) to provide a focus to the voice of engineers appointed to the various panels formed under the Reservoirs Act.
2. The purpose of the PEC is twofold:
  - a. To provide proactive advice on how best to protect the public from the risk of flooding due to dam failure, and,
  - b. To provide feedback, comment and advice on the implementation in England [and Wales] of the recommendations of the Independent Reservoir Safety Review Report published in March 2021 (the Balmforth Report).

### Membership

The current members of the PEC are:

Alan Brown	Mark Hayward
Siobhan Butler	Tony Judge
Paul Farnell	Chris Scott (Chair)
John Foster	

### Activities over past 12 months

The activities of the PEC have been predominantly focused on the interacting with the Reservoir Safety Reform Programme. The programme is split into six workstreams:

1. Hazard Classification
2. Future supply of engineers
3. Reservoir Safety Management Plans
4. MIOS/Risk Management
5. EA: Duties & Powers
6. Legislation

The next sections will outline the PEC's activities in relation to those workstreams.

#### *Workstream 1 - **Hazard Classification***

DEFRA instituted a research project to investigate possible hazard classifications, the safety management practices that may be associated with any new classification system and an initial cost benefit assessment of the research proposals.

The project set up a High-Level Engagement Group (HLEG) to provide input and be consulted as the project proceeded. The HLEG included stakeholders potentially impacted by the outcome. The PEC was invited to participate and three members of the PEC served on the HLEG.

In addition, the PEC supported the organisation of and participated in two workshops undertaken as part of the research project: one on risk assessment process and a second on design review.

Upon completion of the research project, a presentation on the outcomes was made on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025 to which the PEC were invited.

Based on the findings presented at that session, the PEC wrote to Defra expressing concerns about several points around proportionality and the inclusion of small-raised reservoirs. Defra made a holding response indicating the findings were research proposals and not policy. The research reports were to be published in spring 2025 which would have provided greater detail on the research proposals. At the time of writing (July 2025) the research reports had not been published.

### *Workstream 2 – Future supply of engineers*

This workstream is looking to address the recommendations in the Mair report into the future supply of panel engineers. The Mair report made the following recommendations:

- 1) Unlock capacity in the existing panel engineer community.
- 2) Grow ARPE numbers in the short to medium term.
- 3) Reform the Panel structure to align it to any new risk/hazard classification for UK reservoirs and create a stepping stone between the Supervising Engineers Panel and All Reservoirs Panel.
- 4) Deliver a step change in the learning and development support available to panel engineers.
- 5) Improve the commercial environment in which panel engineer services are delivered.

There are several subsidiary recommendations to each of these main headings. The Mair report is clear that the recommendations need to be taken as a set rather than individually. The ICE is working with Defra to deliver the recommendations of the Mair report.

To date activity has focused on recommendations (1) and (3).

On item (1), in 2024 the PEC organised a survey of panel engineers to assess the appetite amongst existing Supervising Engineers to become members of the inspecting panels. The results of this survey were shared with Defra.

Regarding item (3), in the first half of 2025, the PEC engaged with a team involving Defra and the EA considering possible changes to the structure of panels. There were several workshops and papers were prepared. The PEC was actively engaged and both made and commented on proposals. Eventually the Defra/EA team determined the proposals with which they were comfortable and shared them with the chair of the Reservoirs Committee. The ICE responded raising some concerns.

Initial activity has begun on recommendation (5). The task has two initial sub-activities: accessibility of services for small owners and insurance industry engagement.

To look at the accessibility of services for small owners, the team have circulated a questionnaire to panel engineers, a workshop is planned with the representatives of small owners and meetings are planned with commercial leaders in organisations that employ panel engineers to understand the commercial issues associated with small owners. The PEC have had some informal engagement with this activity.

The PEC has had no engagement regarding the insurance industry engagement.

### *Workstream 3 – Reservoir Safety Management Plans*

Following the paper and workshop session at the 2024 BDS Conference, Mott MacDonald were appointed to work with the Defra team on the development of the Reservoir Safety Management Plan framework. The team ran workshops with major owners, smaller owners and panel engineers. Members of the PEC participated in those workshops.

The team gave the PEC an update at the April PEC meeting.

### *Workstream 4 – MIOS/Risk Management*

In 2023 the PEC organised a consultation survey on proposals around updated guidance for Inspecting Engineers. The results were shared with the EA.

This workstream includes the checklist review of Annual Statements and inspection reports being undertaken by the EA. The PEC have not had any engagement with this activity to date.

There has been no further engagement with this workstream.

*Workstream 5 – EA: **Duties & Powers***

There have been no discussions with the PEC on activities around this workstream.

*Workstream 6 – **Legislation***

Defra/Welsh Government have indicated that their current preferred approach is bringing reservoir safety regulation under the environmental permitting regulations to avoid the need for new primary legislation. The wider implications of this are not clear, neither are the more specific implications for panel engineers. For example, under such a regulatory regime which body appoints panel engineers?

The PEC will be seeking to understand these proposals and their implications.

Chris Scott

14<sup>th</sup> July 2025