

On Mon, 9 Mar 2026 at 20:08, Lynne Jones <lynnejones42@gmail.com> wrote:
Dear Editor

In 2010 United Utilities (UU) agreed to a regime to provide some storm space in Thirlmere reservoir to reduce Keswick's flood risk.

By 31 March 2026, UU has to (routinely) apply for a new licence to abstract water from the reservoir, with the Environment Agency (EA) due to decide on the application in early April. **UU's abstraction licence renewal application expressly excludes the operation of the agreed storm space regime.** UU claims it does not believe the EA would grant them the licence with the KFAG regime in place. KFAG was not given any warning of the unilateral breaking of this long-standing agreement protecting our community.

Throughout the entire 16-year period the KFAG releases have operated, UU has never missed their fish flow targets. Despite this, in the current licence application, UU is using misleading data analysis to claim it is impossible for them to meet their environmental obligations with the KFAG releases in place. Their intention is to hoard rainfall and allow the reservoir to overtop more frequently in an unplanned and uncontrolled way to satisfy high flows for the salmon. UU views flooding via reservoir overspill as an "Act of God" and not their responsibility. KFAG maintain that inaction is a choice and that both the EA and UU are complicit in that choice.

The EA sit in the middle as the Flood Risk Management Authority. Present at every meeting with KFAG and UU and yet washing their hands of any responsibility for the storm space agreement, while a separate EA department helps UU tear up that agreement in the unfounded belief that it adversely impacts the creation of occasional high flows for the salmon.

UU say they are happy to make flood mitigation releases if they are instructed by the EA. The EA say they cannot instruct them to do so because they do not have the statutory powers. The buck passing has to stop.

UU should be in a position where it can actively manage the reservoir, despite the high rainfall in that mountainous area. The fact is that only the lower two valves on the reservoir are in reliable working order – and those have only been upgraded in recent years. **The scandal in all this is that the EA, responsible for reservoir safety, have allowed UU to operate the reservoir for many years knowing full well that UU are unable to use the two upper valves on the reservoir which were installed by the Victorians as safety valves, essential if the reservoir should ever be at risk and requires draining.** UU "blind test" these valves rather than risk a full test as, once open, UU can't guarantee they could close the valves again! Presumably "fingers crossed" is the best safety measure we have in the face of what many would consider to be negligence. Is this the best protection we can expect from a statutory flood risk management body?

KFAG believes that the EA should require UU to ensure that the upper scour valves are fully operational on reservoir safety, environmental AND flood risk mitigation grounds. Higher flows could then be achieved for river habitat needs at appropriate times and flood risk management could also be more responsive to storm forecasts.

This is the most serious risk to the safety of the Keswick community from flooding in many years. Thirlmere collects about a third of the rainfall in the Greta catchment. Without adequate

storm space in the reservoir Keswick's river defences, already downgraded from their intended level of protection, will overtop more frequently than should be the case if a pragmatic management regime for the reservoir was in place.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Jones

Chair

Keswick Flood Action Group.

Tel 017687 74075