

## **PRESS RELEASE: Keswick Flood Action Group (K FAG) on United Utilities' (UU's) Proposed Changes to the flood risk management of Thirlmere Reservoir.**

### **Keswick has never flooded from the River Greta if there is adequate storm space in Thirlmere.**

UU believes that it has to stop the "K FAG releases" to renew its abstraction licence to supply water (due for renewal 31 March 2026). These additional releases to provide storm space are "triggered" at different reservoir levels each month according to the flood risk and water resource requirements. They were agreed in 2010 and have been operating ever since.

- Over the last 20 years, Keswick FAG have had ongoing meetings with the EA and UU about creating storm space in Thirlmere to ensure the reservoir does not overtop at the same time as the rest of the catchment is in flood
- UU's most recent licence renewal application specifies no longer releasing water for storm space. UU claim they are unable to meet the requirements for periodic high flows for the Habitats Regulations if these releases continue (despite the fact that the required range of flows have been met by overflows throughout the entire period the storm space agreement has been in place).
- **UU's withdrawal from the agreement was decided without any discussion with K FAG.** Without any attempt at creating storm space the reservoir is likely to overtop by much greater volumes into a fast-flowing catchment. Thus greatly increasing the flood risk for the Keswick community.
- **No replacement flood alleviation scheme is even close to being ready to test, never mind implement. K FAG is strongly opposed to the withdrawal of the current release regime before any new scheme is fully discussed, agreed and trialled. UU needs to apply to vary its application so that the present management regime can continue in the interim.**
- Thirlmere reservoir has two (original Victorian) upper scour valves which have to be tested for reservoir safety. These need to be fully upgraded as, for years, UU has only been able to "blind" test them, exercising the valves in turn so only the small volume of water between the valves is released. Basically, UU are concerned if both valves were tested open then they might not close again. **These valves are, essentially, unusable and we are appalled that the EA, as regulators, have not enforced their upgrade on safety grounds.** If the upper valves were replaced or upgraded there are more options for controlling flood flows pre-storm AND guaranteeing to satisfy higher flows for habitats at the correct times of the year without deliberately allowing the reservoir to overflow. **We're calling for the EA to push UU to have valves that will meet the water release volumes required, rather than rely on uncontrolled overtopping while the entire catchment is in flood, with no thought of the hundreds of properties at risk of flooding downstream.**
- From a national perspective if K FAG loses this agreement it sets back every other flood risk community below a water supply reservoir. We can't fail. Water companies' eye-watering profits might be more justified IF there was some effort put in to balancing the needs of supply with flood risk. Its relatively easy, isn't it? Water falls freely from the sky, they hoard it arguing that if it floods communities below its an "Act of God". Not their problem. With Climate Change forecasts that HAS to change.
- The reservoir is 100% a managed environment. We refuse to accept UU's view that uncontrolled overflow is an "Act of God". Everything is a choice. Actions as well as inactions are impactful. They either choose to keep so much water in the reservoir that they allow it to excessively overtop, being fully aware of the consequences, or they choose to manage Thirlmere for an optimal balance for water supply, habitat requirements and flood risk.
- **The conflict between the EA's role as a Flood Risk Management Authority and its responsibilities for the environment results in pragmatic, proven solutions being abandoned for some spurious suggestions over habitat protection trumping community safety. We've had years of the EA's buck passing and complete lack of spine when dealing with water companies.**

**Would you trust a company to honour larger pre-storm releases when:**

1. It has repeatedly refused to do so before storms (as recently as 10 December)
2. It will not make additional releases when the reservoir is overflowing
3. It is wary of creating out-of-bank flows and litigation so prefers to release insufficient volumes and put the resultant excessive damage from uncontrolled overtopping down to an "Act of God"
4. It does not have 4 working fully working valves (safety issue?) that can be used to achieve the flows needed to create adequate space, especially when rainfall is consistently high pre-storm.
5. Has nobody onsite to monitor flows 24/7, weekends, never mind in a flood situation.
6. It relies on aging structures and procrastinates for years before being forced into investing in upgrading its infrastructure.
7. Rainfall can be hard to predict, each valley can experience totally different rainfall totals so agreements over last minute releases will be hard to reach.
8. UU wants permission from the EA. The EA, as always, pass the buck and say it's the K FAG releases. There is no clearly defined agreement over who makes that decision.
9. 750 MI/d releases were first proposed back in 2010, the total achievable flows from the only 2 working valves are less than those we had been promised 15 years ago.
10. The EA have been far keener to protect the environment than our community. They have far more powers over water companies over pollution and we all know the state of our rivers and lakes. The tail wags the dog.

**Just for background UU's response to our request for a trial pre-storm release before storm Claudia 10/12/25:**

- Firstly, the full operational procedure needs to be properly thought through in detail, agreed and documented. This includes clarity on decision making, H&S risks, communications and responsibilities during both normal and storm conditions.
- Secondly, all relevant landowners must be formally signed up to the approach, and there will also need to be clear and proactive communication with all landowners affected by any proposed releases.
- From a regulatory perspective, it is essential that the Environment Agency clearly specify how much water they expect us to release and when. We are not a flood authority and have zero expertise in doing this, therefore we do not know how much we should or shouldn't release (If we get this slightly wrong we are very used to getting significant legal challenges). I would not be able to secure Executive approval for storm condition releases of up to 600 MI/d (Especially whilst spilling) without clear guidance from the EA.

**Who has any faith that all those parameters can be safely agreed in the next month when 15 years of high-level discussions with MPs etc. have achieved precious little but modelling/ environmental studies .... and inertia.**