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Dear Mrs Bruce

I have been asked to reply to your letter of 10 May to the Secretary of State about water resources in Essex and the proposed expansion of Stansted.

It is true that water resources in Essex are already limited with a tight balance between supplies and demand. Additional growth as proposed at Stansted and other parts of the region will need careful planning to ensure that development does not proceed ahead of secure water supplies. The Environment Agency is working with a range of partners to ensure sustainable solutions are achieved.

Issues over water supply should not, though, be an absolute constraint to development, since ultimately further transfers of water can be made, or even desalination plant installed. Whilst this may not always be the best solution environmentally, it may be the right answer in terms of wider sustainability, taking into account social and economic needs.

The Environment Agency has a statutory duty to secure the proper use of water resources in England and Wales. In accordance with this duty the Agency prepared and published national and regional water resources strategies in 2001. These set out the pressures on water resources and how the Agency expects these to be managed to 2025. The Anglian Region strategy covers many of the aspects you raised. It demonstrates the range of possible outcomes, and gives a preferred strategy. The strategy is based on a 'twin track' approach of demand management and resource development. Specific measures indicated for the Essex area include:

- public supply demand management including widespread household metering, household water conservation, leakage control and potential for grey water re-use in new developments
- an ongoing programme of waste minimisation and industrial water efficiency
- ensuring that maximum water efficiency is built into all new developments
- increased Ely Ouse - Essex transfer potentially meeting the needs of three water companies

