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Elizabeth Truss MP  
House of Commons  
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From Lord Taylor of Holbeach  
Parliamentary Under Secretary

*Dear Elizabeth*

Thank you for your letter of 1 February to Richard Benyon about water shortages in East Anglia and your call for a meeting to discuss the issues and strategies to deal with a potential drought. I am replying as Duty Minister during the Recess period.

Ministers are aware of the continued drought in East Anglia and the potential impacts this has for farmers and the environment. The Secretary of State held Drought Summit meetings in May and June last year to bring together representatives of the sectors most effected and consider actions necessary to manage the affects of drought.

Due to the continued development of drought in specific regions, a further Drought Summit meeting will be held later this month. Attendees will include representatives of the sectors most affected and include, amongst others, representatives of the water industry, the agricultural and food production sectors, and the Environment Agency. The drought summit will allow the Environment Agency to update everyone on the current drought situation and present emerging findings from its drought prospects report. It will also allow attendees to consider actions to mitigate the impacts of drought.

In addition to this activity to manage the impacts of drought, the Government is also considering the longer term aspects. While drought is a result of the weather and cannot be predicted we do know that in future we are likely to experience reduced and more variable supplies of water and more extreme events such as drought. The recently published Water White Paper sets out our plans for the reform of the water abstraction regime to provide clearer signals to abstractors to make the necessary investment in resilience to the impacts of climate change and increasing demand for water.

The Environment Agency is continuing to work with the sectors affected by the drought. These impacts will often be at a local level and it can offer advice on best practice and put abstractors in touch with groups working in their local area. Its customer contact number is 03708 506 506 (Mon-Fri, 8am - 8pm).

With best wishes.  
J. Taylor

LORD TAYLOR OF HOLBEACH