



THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



January 19, 2024

Honorable Joaquin Esquivel, Chair
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Esquivel:

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our support for, and to encourage you to take definitive action to approve, the **Agreements to support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes** as the alternative for updating the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan.

On March 29, 2022, the Governor convened federal, state, and local water leaders to announce broad agreement on measures to provide additional water flows, new habitat and other non-flow ecosystem benefits, a robust,

collaborative and transparent science and governance structure, and long-term, stable funding to help improve conditions in the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta watershed. This agreement, referred to as the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes proposals, are the culmination of more than five years of collaboration among the California Natural Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency, public water agencies throughout California, and other stakeholders to develop a modern approach to protecting all beneficial uses of water in the Bay-Delta watershed.

This collaborative and scientifically-grounded approach to resolving conflicts in the Bay-Delta is critical for water users south of the Delta. The region has already made, and is planning to make, investments in our diverse and connected water supply that has and will continue to reduce reliance on the Bay-Delta while ensuring a safe, affordable drinking water for more than 20 million Californians. Southern California has long been a leader in proactively finding flexible and efficient solutions to address the strains that climate change is placing on our water delivery system. We've established robust water use efficiency programs while simultaneously making significant investments in local and regional projects that increase our regional self-sufficiency.

While we continue to increase our local supplies, the State Water Project remains an essential source for the state and our region, serving as the foundation for our daily water needs as more local and regional projects are explored and implemented. The Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes are essential components for creating the reliability, certainty, and availability of water supplies from the state's backbone infrastructure system to protect south of Delta water resilience.

Water suppliers acknowledge that water flows are important components of habitat protection – and the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes proposal dedicates between 500,000 acre-feet and 800,000 acre-feet of additional water to the environment in many water years – but we need a new approach where every drop of water dedicated to the environment serves a biological function. The updated Delta water quality standards should protect all beneficial uses. The unimpaired flow (flow-centric) approach that is also on the table for consideration in updating the Bay-Delta Plan, may not improve conditions for fish and wildlife and will not protect all beneficial uses, including water supplies for millions of Southern Californians, irrigation for agriculture, and hydroelectric power generation that is essential to California's resilient energy grid.

The Healthy Rivers and Landscapes proposal is consistent with California's co-equal goals of providing a more reliable water supply for California and protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Delta ecosystem and would satisfy and fulfill many of the substantial needs to advancing a comprehensive and integrated approach to updating the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan, including:

- ✓ Substantial dedication of water flows to the environment
- ✓ Significantly reduced environmental effects throughout California
- ✓ A comprehensive portfolio of actions designed to reactivate floodplains for robust populations of fish and wildlife
- ✓ A commitment to over \$2.5 billion in funding to support the proposals
- ✓ Actions throughout the state designed to restore ecosystem function
- ✓ Recognition of the important contribution that hydroelectric generation during the summer provides for California's grid stability and reliability

- ✓ Inclusive governance that will address changing climate conditions and support research to improve management actions
- ✓ Commitment to collaborative, adaptatively managed and structured science programs
- ✓ Processes for resolving litigation and regulatory issues that have stifled implementing innovative water resources stewardship and management practices

While there have been some notable successes, the various efforts to manage the Bay-Delta over the recent decades have not worked as planned overall, as both important species and water supply reliability have declined in the Bay-Delta and throughout the state. To change course and offer a different approach and trajectory, it is important to advance these innovative agreements for healthy rivers and landscapes, which will improve environmental conditions quickly and holistically, and will provide certainty to communities, farms, and businesses.

We encourage the State Water Board's adoption of the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes proposals as the best alternative for meeting the objectives for the Delta Plan update and to fulfill the State Water Board's obligation to reasonably balance the multitude of factors and considerations when updating the Delta Plan.

Sincerely,



Charles Wilson, Executive Director
Southern California Water Coalition



Jon Switalski, Executive Director
Rebuild SoCal Partnership



Heather Dyer, Chief Executive Officer
San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District



Matthew Stone, General Manager
Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency



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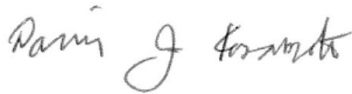
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Benjamin Lopez, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy
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Mike Roos, President
Southern California Leadership Council



Richard Lambrose, Executive Director
Secure Water Alliance

cc: Members, State Water Resources Control Board