

Statement by Felicia Marcus, Chair of the State Water Resources Control Board on January 31, 2014:

I am Felicia Marcus, Chair of the State Water Resources Control Board—often called the State Water Board. The State Water Board is charged with protecting California’s water quality and water rights system.

Tom Howard, the Executive Director of the State Water Board, is here as well, and will be explaining the action today that he is taking under his delegated temporary urgency authority.

I’d like to focus briefly on the overall situation we find ourselves in, and also talk about actions that the Water Board is taking in the coming weeks. It is important to note that our Board meets and makes decisions in open session, and I am not speaking for the Board here, and will not speak directly to the order. My colleagues and I will have an opportunity to review the order, and any comments received from the public in the coming days.

As Mark explained, this is the most serious drought in modern times and we will have to face it head-on and make many hard decisions in the days, weeks, and months to come. We have little water in storage and minimal snow pack. Because it may not rain or snow, we need to conserve what little we have to use later in the year, or even for use in later years. Doing so will allow water managers to prevent saltwater intrusion and protect drinking water supplies when we most need to, for as long as possible, and also preserve water for later human, agricultural, and environmental use as the drought continues. Exactly how we collectively do that will be the subject of much discussion in the coming days.

To emphasize Mark’s point, everyone – farmers, fish and people in cities and towns – will get less water because of the drought. As a result of today’s temporary urgency actions, many will get even less than they expect at this point in time even in this drought. Today’s actions are not easy actions to take, but may be the most responsible approach at this moment in time, if we are to preserve our ability to act in the future. We are all in this together, and my colleagues and I on the Board will be looking for feedback on what are the best possible actions to protect the public interest overall as we go through an extremely rough period for all.

Later this month, on February 18 and 19, our Board is holding a public workshop to discuss how to best protect the public interest with minimal water supplies. That workshop will allow a public discussion of the temporary order that Tom is taking under his delegated authority as Executive Director, and we also hope to explore a range of other options to respond to the drought..

There will be some who try to pit one kind of water use against another, or one region against another, or one agency against another. That is understandable given the hardship to come, but it won’t help us get through this--we will have to collaborate our way through as never before. Instead of the conflict that you frequently hear about in the water world, there are also myriad examples of agencies and individuals stepping up to help their neighbors directly, or reducing water use through their conservation, water recycling, and integrated water management of all kinds. Let’s call on that part of

our humanity in this crisis even as we acknowledge how tragic a situation many are in and find ways to help.