California Regional Water Quality Control Board

Los Angeles Region

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CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT REQUIREMENTS

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region (hereinafter referred to as the Regional Board) is the Lead Agency for evaluating the environmental impacts of the proposed amendment to the Quality Control Plan for the Los Angeles Region (Basin Plan) to revise the interim effluent limits in the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Nitrogen Compounds and Related Effects in the Los Angeles River, Resolution 03-009. The proposed amendment revises the interim effluent limits for ammonia in the Los Angeles River. The Secretary of Resources has certified the basin planning process as exempt from certain requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), including preparation of an initial study, a negative declaration, and environmental impact report (California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15251). As the proposed amendment to the Basin Plan is part of the basin planning process, the environmental information developed for and included with the amendment is considered functionally equivalent to an initial study, negative declaration, and/or environmental impact report.

Any regulatory program of the Regional Board certified as functionally equivalent, however, must satisfy the documentation requirements of California Code of Regulations, title 23, section 3777(a) which requires the following:

- A written report providing:
  - a description of the proposed activity;
  - reasonable alternatives to the proposed activity; and
  - mitigation measures to minimize any significant adverse impacts.

- A completed environmental checklist that includes:
  - a checklist of environmental impacts;
  - a discussion of the environmental evaluation; and
  - a determination with respect to significant environmental impacts.

The attached checklist and Staff Memorandum for the proposed amendment to revise the interim effluent limits in the TMDL for Nitrogen Compounds and Related Effects in the Los Angeles River fulfill the requirements of section 3777, subdivision (a).

I. Description of Proposed Activity

The Los Angeles River flows for 55 miles from the Santa Monica Mountains at the western end of the San Fernando Valley to the Pacific Ocean at San Pedro Bay. It drains a watershed with an area of 834 square miles. Many segments of the Los Angeles River and its tributaries contain elevated levels of nutrients that adversely impact the water and contribute to odors, scum, foam, and algae. These impaired segments exceed water quality objectives (WQOs) for ammonia, pH, nutrients (including nitrogen compounds such as nitrite and nitrate), odors, scum/foam, and algae, which appears to be primarily related to ammonia. Impaired segments (i.e. reaches) of the Los Angeles River were included on the 1998 and 2002 California 303(d) list of impaired waterbodies.

At a public hearing on July 10, 2003, the Regional Board considered amending the Basin Plan to include a TMDL for nitrogen compounds and their effects in the Los Angeles River. At the hearing, representatives from the City of Los Angeles, owners and operators of the Donald C. Tillman and Los Angeles-Glendale Water Reclamation Plants, requested that the Regional Board consider different interim effluent limits than those provided by Regional Board staff. The discharger proposed a different data set from that used by Regional Board staff as more representative of the anticipated performance of the WRPS during the period of time when the nitrification and denitrification facilities will be constructed.

Resolution No. 03-009 was adopted by the Regional Board on July 10, 2003. The resolution served to set waste load allocations (WLAs) to major POTWs, minor point sources, and MS4s permittees discharging to specified reaches of the Los Angeles River. The Regional Board directed staff to consider alternative interim effluent limits proposed by the dischargers.

Regional Board staff have been working with the discharger and have held two meetings with the City on July 25 and September 25, 2003, for the purpose of evaluating the most representative data sets and appropriate calculational methods for determining the interim effluent limits for the Donald C. Tillman and Los Angeles Glendale Water Reclamation Plants. Regional Board staff recommendations are summarized in a memorandum dated September 30, 2003. The proposed amendment would revise the interim effluent limits for ammonia listed in the Basin Plan amendment, Resolution 03-009, and allow the dischargers to improve their systems to reduce nutrient loads to the Los Angeles River, and at the same time, be able to comply with ammonia limits in the interim period.

The "project" for purposes of this environmental document is solely the amendment to the Basin Plan to establish alternative, interim effluent limitation. Alternatives to the proposed project include leaving the interim limits as adopted by the Regional Board, adopting more-stringent interim effluent limitations, or adopting more-relaxed interim effluent limitations. A "no action" alternative could potentially leave the POTWs subject to more stringent interim effluent

limitations that may not reflect past plant performance. Under this scenario, interim upgrades to the POTWs may be required that would slow the completion of final upgrades necessary to achieve the final waste load allocation. For the same reasons, more-stringent interim effluent limitations would potentially slow compliance with final waste load allocations. Finally, more-relaxed effluent limitations would potentially violate antibacksliding and/or antidegradation provisions and result in lower water quality from existing levels.

		Environmental Impacts YES MAYBE NO
1.	**Earth. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Unstable earth conditions or in changes in geologic substructures?	NO
	b. Disruptions, displacements, compaction or overcoming of the soil?	NO
	c. Change in topography or ground surface relief features?	NO
	d. The destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?	NO
	e. Any increase in wind or water erosion of soils, either on or off the site?	NO
	f. Changes in deposition or erosion of beach sands, or changes in siltation, deposition or erosion which may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed of the ocean or any bay, inlet or lake?	NO
	g. Exposure of people or property to geologic hazards, such as earthquakes, landslides, mudslides, ground failure, or similar hazards?	NO
2.	**Air. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Substantial air emissions or deterioration of ambient air quality?	NO
	b. The creation of objectionable odors?	NO
	c. Alteration of air movement, moisture or temperature, or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?	NO
3.	**Water. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Changes in currents, or the course of direction or water movements, in either marine or fresh waters?	NO
	b. Changes in absorption rates, drainage patterns, or the rate and amount of surface water runoff?	NO

		Environmental Impacts YES MAYBE NO
	c. Alterations to the course of flow of flood waters?	NO
	d. Change in the amount of surface water in any water body?	NO
	e. Discharge into surface waters, or in any alteration of surface water quality, including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity?	MAYBE
	f. Alteration of the direction or rate of flow of ground waters?	NO
	g. Change in the quantity or quality of ground waters, either through direct additions or withdrawals, or through interception of an aquifer by cuts or excavations?	NO
	h. Substantial reduction in the amount of water otherwise available for public water supplies?	NO
	i. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding or tidal waves?	NO
4.	**Plant Life. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Change in the diversity of species, or number of any species of plants (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, microflora and aquatic plants)?	NO
	b. Reduction of the numbers of any unique, rare or endangered species of plants?	NO
	c. Introduction of new species of plants into an area, or in a barrier to the normal replenishment of existing species?	NO
	d. Reduction in acreage of any agricultural crop?	NO
5.	**Animal Life. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Change in the diversity of species, or numbers of any species of animals (birds, land animals including reptiles, fish and shellfish, benthic organisms, insects or microfauna)?	NO

		Environmental Impacts YES MAYBE NO
	b. Reduction of the numbers of any unique, rare or endangered species of animals?	NO
	c. Introduction of new species of animals into an area, or result in a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?	NO
	d. Deterioration to existing fish or wildlife habitat?	NO
6.	**Noise. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Increases in existing noise levels?	NO
	b. Exposure of people to severe noise levels?	NO
7.	**Light and Glare. Will the proposal:**	
	a. Produce new light or glare?	NO
8.	**Land Use. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Substantial alteration of the present or planned land use of an area?	NO
9.	**Natural Resources. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Increase in the rate of use of any natural resources?	NO
	b. Substantial depletion of any nonrenewable natural resource?	NO
10.	**Risk of Upset. Will the proposal involve:**	
	a. A risk of an explosion or the release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to: oil, pesticides, chemicals or radiation) in the event of an accident or upset conditions?	NO
11.	**Population. Will the proposal:**	
	a. Alter the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?	NO

		Environmental Impacts YES MAYBE NO
12.	**Housing. Will the proposal:**	
	a. Affect existing housing, or create a demand for additional housing?	NO
13.	**Transportation/Circulation. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Effects on existing parking facilities, or demand for new parking?	NO
	b. Substantial impact upon existing transportation systems?	NO
	c. Alterations to present patterns of circulation or movement of people and/or goods?	NO
	d. Alterations to waterborne, rail or air traffic?	NO
	e. Increase in traffic hazards to motor vehicles, bicyclists or pedestrians?	NO
14.	**Public Service. Will the proposal have an effect upon, or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas:**	
	a. Fire protection?	NO
	b. Police protection?	NO
	c. Schools?	NO
	d. Parks or other recreational facilities?	NO
	e. Maintenance of public facilities, including roads?	NO
	f. Other governmental services?	NO
15.	**Energy. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Use of substantial amounts of fuel or energy?	NO
	b. Substantial increase in demand upon existing sources of energy, or require the development of new sources of energy?	NO

		Environmental Impacts YES MAYBE NO
16.	**Utilities and Service Systems. Will the proposal result in a need for new systems, or substantial alterations to the following utilities:**	
	a. Power or natural gas?	NO
	b. Communications systems?	NO
	c. Water?	NO
	d. Sewer or septic tanks?	NO
	e. Storm water drainage?	NO
	f. Solid waste and disposal?	NO
17.	**Human Health. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Creation of any health hazard or potential health hazard (excluding mental health)?	NO
	b. Exposure of people to potential health hazards?	NO
18.	**Aesthetics. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. The obstruction of any scenic vista or view open to the public?	NO
	b. The creation of an aesthetically offensive site open to public view?	NO
19.	**Recreation. Will the proposal result in:**	
	a. Impact upon the quality or quantity of existing recreational opportunities?	NO
20.	**Archeological/Historical. Will the proposal:**	
	a. Result in the alteration of a significant archeological or historical site structure, object or building?	NO

		Environmental Impacts YES MAYBE NO
21.	**Mandatory Findings of Significance**	
	Potential to degrade: Does the project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	NO
	Short-term: Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals? (A short-term impact on the environment is one which occurs in a relatively brief, definitive period of time, while long-term impacts will endure well into the future.)	NO
	Cumulative: Does the project have impacts which are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project may impact on two or more separate resources where the impact on each resource is relatively small, but where the effect of the total of those impacts on the environment is significant.)	NO
	Substantial adverse: Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	NO

III. DISCUSSION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

Expand on all "YES" and "MAYBE" answers given to the preceding questions in regard to environmental impacts. The evaluation shall consider whether the environmental impact indicated will have a substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the activity. In addition, the evaluation should discuss environmental effects in proportion to their severity and probability of occurrence. (Use additional pages if necessary.)

3.e. This Basin Plan amendment is intended to allow the discharger to be in compliance while up grading the treatment systems to reduce nutrient loads in the Los Angeles River. After the facilities are constructed, this will improve the quality of surface water, the Los Angeles River, by reducing nutrients and increasing the dissolved oxygen content of the river. During the period of construction, this action will not alter the quality of effluent presently discharged to the Los Angeles River.

IV. DETERMINATION
On the basis of this initial evaluation:

☒ I find the proposed Basin Plan amendment could not have a significant effect on the environment.

☐ I find that the proposed Basin Plan amendment could have a significant adverse effect on the environment. However, there are feasible alternatives and/or feasible mitigation measures that would substantially lessen any significant adverse impact. These alternatives are discussed in the attached written report.

☐ I find the proposed Basin Plan amendment may have a significant effect on the environment. There are no feasible alternatives and/or feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen any significant adverse impacts. See the attached written report for a discussion of this determination.

DATE:

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Dennis A. Dickerson
Executive Officer