

Westlands Water District



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October 26, 2017

Via Email: CWFhearing@waterboards.ca.gov

Re: Statement of the Westlands Water District General Manager on California WaterFix

Dear Hearing Officers Doduc and Marcus,

On September 19, 2017, the Westlands Board of Directors voted to not participated in the California WaterFix as presented. However, that decision was not based on any opposition to the project. To the contrary, every director who voted to not participate observed that Delta conveyance issues must to resolved to address chronic water supply shortages that have devastated the San Joaquin Valley and put at risk the economy of the entire state. Westlands continues to support efforts to implement the California WaterFix.

To put it in its most succinct form, the Westlands Board's decision was, in larg part, a reaction to the "participation approach" proposed by the Bureau of Reclamation for allocation of the capital and operations and maintenance costs of the project. Under that proposal, those costs would be recovered from only those Central Valley Project contractors that chose to participate in the project. Moreover, Reclamation would not provide any assurance that those contractors would receive the incremental water supply produced by the project. Under this proposal, Westlands would be responsible for approximately 40% of the capital costs of the project, and, in the best case, would result in an average blended cost of \$565 an acre-foot.

If the issues related to cost allocation, which would impose a disproportionate burden on Westlands, can be resolved, I am confident that Westlands will revisit its decision. For the Westlands Board, the ultimate question is whether the project will produce an affordable, reliable supply of water. But the decision to not participate was not based on the merits of the project.

Westlands is working diligently to address the cost allocation issue, and we have expressed to the Department of Water Resources and other public water agencies involved in the project that Westlands wants to continue discussions for participation in the California WaterFix. From Westlands' perspective, it would be unfortunate to abandon the work completed for the project by modifying the description of the project. And it would be unfortunate if the State Water Resources Control Board were to delay these proceedings. Until the State Water Board makes a decision in these proceedings, issues related to water supply cannot be finally resolved.

Today, we do not know where that discussion will lead, but I do know, with almost absolute certainty, that if we cannot resolve the issues surrounding the California WaterFix and if the project is not constructed in the near term, we will come to regret it. The status quo is not acceptable. At-risk species in the Delta will continue to decline and additional restrictions will be

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imposed on Central Valley Project and State Water Project operations. Completion of the California WaterFix is critical to addressing these issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thomas W. Birmingham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thomas W. Birmingham
General Manager
Westlands Water District