



October 6, 2010

Ms. Pamela Creedon, Executive Officer
Central Valley Regional Water Control Board
11020 Sun Center Drive, Suite 200
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670

Subject: Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District (SRCSD) Draft Discharge Permit

Dear Ms. Creedon:

I write with concerns over the Central Valley Regional Water Control Board's (Regional Board) Draft Discharge Permit to the Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District (SRCSD).

Currently, the SRCSD treats and safely discharges approximately 150 million gallons of wastewater into the Sacramento River from most of Sacramento County and the City of West Sacramento in Yolo County, which is a portion of my Assembly District. While the SRCSD acknowledges they are currently the largest single source of ammonia in the Delta, there are smaller wastewater treatment plants and agricultural dischargers that contribute to the ammonia level.

The Regional Board to date has permitted the SRCSD to discharge relatively high concentrations of ammonia because the river has historically provided sufficient dilution. The SRCSD also has large storage basins to hold its treated wastewater whenever river dilution has been insufficient. I believe it important to note that current Delta and SRCSD ammonia concentrations are significantly lower than U.S. Environmental Protection Agency guidelines on aquatic toxicity, designed to protect the most sensitive aquatic species.

Recent scientific studies suggest ammonia levels in the Sacramento River may be a threat to Delta smelt and other native fish by disrupting the food web. The Regional Board draft discharge permit requires the SRCSD to remove essentially all ammonia and nitrates from the discharge at an estimated cost of \$782 million.

In addition, to reduce the risk of infection from pathogens in the river, the draft permit has a lower threshold for pathogens requiring the SRCSD to capture through filtration very small particles and pathogens in the treated effluent and then use ultraviolet light (UV), instead of chlorination, to inactivate pathogens and other microorganisms. SRCSD estimates micro-filtration would cost up to \$1.16 billion and UV disinfection would cost up to \$116 million. If the Regional Board finalizes the draft permit as is, SRCSD estimates that it will have to spend up to \$2 billion retrofitting its treatment plant to comply with permit requirements. Of course, the SRCSD is concerned about the costs.

The SRCSD accepts current science that supports the need to remove about half of the ammonia from its effluent because in the future, dilution will be less of a solution to pollution – but disputes that total ammonia removal is justified without further study. The SCRSD therefore argues that the higher standard should not be a condition of their discharge permit. Moreover, since 2007, the Regional Board has issued 18 permits to other municipal treatment plants that provide the same ratio of dilution as the Sacramento River as does the SRCSD at its discharge point. Further, scientists have not yet agreed on whether nitrate from the removal of ammonia significantly harms the Delta ecosystem or fish.

As to the Regional Board's proposed lower threshold for pathogens, in all but two of the 18 finalized permits, the Regional Board did not require filtration. In addition, the Regional Board and the Department of Public Health have not yet demonstrated public safety is or will be at risk.

Based on the information our office has received, I ask that the Regional Board carefully reconsider the elements in its Draft Discharge Permit that appear to hold the SRCSD to a higher standard absent further scientific review. While we can all agree that we must protect the Delta and its many species, we should do so with all of the facts in front of us. To do otherwise could result in unnecessary costs that neither public agencies nor the taxpayers can afford.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mariko Yamada", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Mariko Yamada
Assemblymember, 8th A.D.