



October 31, 2016

David Sholes
Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
11020 Sun Center Drive, #200
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670-6114

Re: Comments on the Tule Water Quality Coalition Groundwater Quality Management Plan

Dear Mr. Sholes,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Tule Lake Basin Water Quality Coalition Groundwater Quality Management Plan (GQMP or Plan). The General Order identifies this plan as “the key mechanism under this Order to help ensure that waste discharges from irrigated lands are meeting Groundwater Receiving Water Limitation.” In that context, we find this order to be lacking in specific performance measures and timelines. As written, the plan contains no assurances that adequate steps will be taken to meet receiving water limitations and thus it does not comply with the Order, Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, nor the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act.

We appreciate that the Plan provides a list of specific practices found to be effective in protecting groundwater quality. We also appreciate the inclusion of outreach and education tools such as a grower/advisor webpage, technical workshops, targeted mailings, and a database of outreach activities to cover past, ongoing, and future activities. However, the Plan does not include any sort of monitoring to ensure any of the recommended management practices are actually being implemented.

Additionally, are concerned that this Plan does not go far enough to address the serious impacts of nitrates contamination already occurring within the Coalition’s boundaries. The Order is clear that a higher standard of implementing best management practices are needed within GQMP areas. The potential for groundwater contamination is too high to require anything less. Below are some areas of concern we have regarding the plan.

Management Strategy & Management Practices

The “management strategy” states it will rely on “the implementation of various but coordinated monitoring elements as outlined in the General Order.” This is insufficient and the Plan needs to detail how they plan to implement these elements and coordinate their results within further updates to the Plan. Furthermore, while the Plan does provide a list of current effective management practices, it does not include a program for monitoring implementation of these practices.

The Plan is also unclear on what “technically and economically feasible for growers to implement” will look like in practice. Growers within GQMP areas must be held to a higher standard due to their potential impacts to groundwater quality.

In regards to abandoned wells, the Plan states it will work with growers to identify “county resources for appropriate well destruction in the case of abandonments...” and “provide information on proper well destruction at outreach events, and feedback from Farm Evaluation Plans on proper wellhead management.” This is insufficient. The Plan must include a workplan for how the Coalition will identify improperly abandoned wells and wells with insufficient wellhead protection. This is a relatively easy addition to include within the Plan.

Other concerns:

- The Coalition’s GAR was conditionally approved, yet the work that still has to be completed by January 6, 2017 is extensive. There needs to be a clear workplan on how those objectives will be completed in time. Additionally, it is not clear that the HVAs have even been adequately determined, and there are numerous data deficiencies that must be remedied.
- The table on page 15, while interesting, is not very useful as it lacks any sort of trend data. For example, the table highlights one well, at some point in time, had a NO3 level of 657 mg/L. This is an alarmingly high number and yet we have no further data on when that level was detected, where it is located, or what the levels for that well was in the years preceding or following that particular measurement.
- The Coalition lists several sources of nitrate contamination, yet fails to provide a workplan on how to address nitrate contamination from dairies, septics, and small wastewater systems. All serious contributors to nitrates must be addressed.

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to comment on these documents. We look forward to working with your staff and the coalitions on the implementation of this and other Groundwater Management Plans.



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