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Friends of the ESTUARY

PROTECTING • RESTORING • ENHANCING
THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY-DELTA ESTUARY

September 20, 1999

Mr. Lester Snow
Executive Director
CALFED
1416 Ninth Street, Room 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Snow:

I am writing on behalf of Friends of the San Francisco Estuary (Friends) to provide you with our comments on CALFED's June 1999 Draft Environmental Impact Report/Statement and the Revised Phase II Report.

Friends is an organization that grew out of the San Francisco Estuary Project and our mission is to help implement the Estuary Project's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). In 1993, two years before the CALFED Program commenced, the Estuary Project completed the CCMP for the Bay and Delta. One hundred private, government and community interests worked together for six years to develop 145 actions to save fish, conserve water, protect wetlands, reduce pollution, and facilitate environmentally sound land-use planning. The CCMP was signed by the Governor and the U.S. EPA Administrator.

The CCMP remains the only approved, completed ecosystem-wide plan for balancing environmental protection and beneficial use of Estuary resources. Many of the groups/agencies and individuals that worked on the CCMP are today participating in the CALFED process. Thus it serves as an ideal litmus test for many of the actions proposed by CALFED in the draft EIR/S.

CALFED is to be commended for grasping an enormously complex set of issues. The Ecosystem Restoration Program overall is a highly commendable set of actions aimed at worthy goals and manifesting a solid understanding of needs. Adaptive Management and monitoring are particularly noteworthy tools. They encourage us to believe that implementation of the ERP can be successful-- given adequate funding.

Friends of the Estuary supports Alternative I, excluding any new off-stream surface reservoir, or a Screened diversion of 4,000 cfs between the Sacramento River at Hood and the Mokelumne River, during Stage I implementation actions. A storage facility within a Delta island could be an exception.

Friends sees opportunities for strengthening Alternative I. They are as follows:

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Bay Wetlands Restoration Must Have Higher Priority
The CCMP recognized that the watershed of the San Francisco Estuary forms an integral whole, from the Sierras to South San Francisco Bay. Biologically all elements of the Estuary were found to be integrally connected. San Francisco Bay-Delta water issues were a primary component of the CCMP and that document recognized that these water issues affected the entire Estuary ecosystem including all of San Francisco Bay.

CALFED has not seen fit to give San Pablo and San Francisco Bays anything like their due in terms of priority in the "solution" part of the restoration equation. Only North San Francisco Bay and Suisun Bay make a modest appearance in Zone Two of the Ecological Management Zones. Yet stressors cited in Zone Two: water diversions, non-native species, zebra mussels, predation and competition, contaminants, fish and wildlife harvest, stranding and disturbance also occur in the main and south San Francisco Bays.

This low priority baffles us. WHY? The major target of CALFED ecosystem restoration funding has been targeted for fishery recovery through habitat restorations. Scientists freely acknowledge that Bay wetlands are a major part of the food web so vital to anadromous fish restoration throughout the ecosystem. The wetlands are in fact aquatic farms with rich harvests of nutrients. Much of Bay wetland degradation is clearly connected to upstream degradation in water quality, pollution and reduced flows. Yet less than 5 percent of funding to date has gone to lower Bays projects. CALFED must do better.

No Guarantee of Fresh Water for Restoration
The Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan depends upon a sufficient supply of fresh water to succeed. Nowhere in the EIR/S is there a guarantee of additional restoration water. The present beneficial standards obviously are insufficient. Re-operation of project systems may produce more efficiency. Will such water be dedicated to Restoration? Will it find its way to an Environmental Water Account? More likely, it will be diverted to agriculture and urban supplies in the interest of "reliability". Lack of environmental water was the major contributor to the failing ecosystem that fostered CALFED. CALFED's most important task is identifying a guaranteed environmental water supply.

Increased Diversions of Fresh Water Inflows from the Bays
We cannot understand why CALFED intends to build more dams and divert huge new volumes of fresh water from the Bays before you know what the impacts are to the Bays. Principle Six states: there shall be no redirected impacts. Yet you are proceeding with planning for up to 12 new dams and reservoirs without scientific evidence that diverting massive amounts of peak winter flows is harmless both in hydrologic and environmental terms. ***More diversions of fresh water from the Bays and near-Ocean should not take place until:***

- evidence is clear that oxygen content is not damaged, flushing is sufficient, and wildlife is not impaired
- numerical goals are established for fish and wildlife recovery and sustainability
- the impacts of diversions of fresh water inflow from the Bay are monitored
- CALFED insists that State Water Resources Control Board sets standards to restore historical levels (1922 - 1967) of fish and wildlife resources
- Suisun Marsh is preserved through adequate protective measures, including maintenance of fresh water inflows
- Entrapment Zone conditions meet the standards set forth by the Bay Conservation and Development Commission

Dams Should be Damned in Stage I

Friends agreed with CALFED's December 1998 Phase II position that major new surface storage projects should not be started during Stage I. Water conservation, underground storage, reclamation, integrated flood plain management, and other actions would be fully developed and tested first.

Now we learn in several appendices and the revised Phase II Report that development may commence on up to 12 new dams during Stage I. There should be no such actions during the first seven years after the Record of Decision. Alternatives to such construction must be given full opportunity to work. Then, if *all* stakeholders agree that more surface storage is a necessity and *users* are willing to pay, construction of new projects could commence.

A Peripheral Canal by any other Name

The proposed new North Delta Screened Diversion looks very much like the first leg of the Peripheral Canal. The size, 4,000 cfs, is a canal larger than any canal in the Central Valley Project, according to Congressman George Miller. The argument that proposed new drinking water standards can be met only by piping Sacramento River water from above the tidal zone borders on the absurd. Only a fraction of one percent of that water, or any water exported from the Delta, is ever drunk by humans. Most water goes to irrigate farms and other non-potable water uses. The logical action is to use new technologies to treat drinking water locally. Why spend billions for a Peripheral Canal? The inescapable logic is that the Canal is water for: 1) massive new development in Southern California; 2) expensive water paid for by all state and federal taxpayers, rather than by actual users; and 3) more irrigation water to make up for water taken to meet beneficial standards, such as B2 water in the Central Valley Project Improvement Act.

"CALFED is wading into very dangerous waters here, promoting a highly divisive approach that has been rejected by state voters and threatens the

integrity of the stakeholder process", stated Congressman Miller recently. Friends says "Amen".

Water Quality
The CALFED EIR/S cites SFEP's 1993 CCMP as a resource document. We are enclosing the 1999 Environmental Report Card, which describes progress and lack of progress in terms of implementing the CCMP and restoring the Bay-Delta Estuary over the past six years. This 28-page document is a template in form, and a handy tool for making comparisons between the CCMP and the several CALED EIR/S technical appendices addressing water quality and other CALFED programs. We urge CALFED to cross reference relevant EIR/S appendices with the Report Card, if you have not already done so.

The Bay Conservation and Development Commission has adopted policies in its San Francisco Bay Plan and Suisun Marsh Protection Plan addressing fresh water inflows from the Delta. Friends supports these policies, and the updated recommendations you will receive from them.

Water Conservation
The EIR/S contains the needed targets for urban and agriculture water savings. What it does not have is a strong enough plan for achieving Best Management Practices. Given that agriculture uses 80 to 85 percent of all the managed water in California it seems logical that agriculture would be encouraged to use those BMPs that will guarantee the conservation of water. CALFED should recognize that a five percent savings by urban users equals less than one percent savings by agriculture, so it is evident that agriculture savings are five times more beneficial. Your "response to comments" in the Water Use Efficiency Program Plan also noted that urban suppliers are required to conserve whereas agriculture is only asked to come up with a plan – not very equitable or logical.

"User Pays" Financing
Friends urges CALFED to do much more than it has done to come up with a significant finance plan, and make a turn-around from the "Taxpayer Pays" financing which has dominated program funding to date.

Sincerely,

Ted Smith

Ted Smith, President
Friend of the Estuary