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Statement before the U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Water and Power of the Committee on Resources
by Frances Spivy-Weber, Executive Director for Policy, Mono Lake Committee

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Thank you for this opportunity to meet with the House Subcommittee on Water and Power. I wear several water policy hats in Southern California and statewide. Regionally, I serve as the co-chair of the Southern California Water Dialogue, a multi-stakeholder group that meets monthly to discuss water issues. The Dialogue also serves as a Southern California focal point for the California Bay-Delta Authority (formerly called CalFed), providing information to the Authority about the region and transmitting information about CalFed to the region. CalFed has provided the Dialogue with a consultant staff person for 18 months, who works closely with the volunteer steering committee and other Dialogue participants.

Statewide, I serve on the CalFed Bay-Delta Public Advisory Committee and am co-chair of the Water Use Efficiency Subcommittee. This year, I am the convener of the California Urban Water Conservation Council, and I am a member of the State Advisory Committee to the California Water Plan. My organization, the Mono Lake Committee, supports my work on regional and statewide water policy because Mono Lake, located at the northernmost end of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, is being restored to health in large part because the Committee was successful in having state and federal funding made available to Los Angeles for conservation and water reclamation projects. These projects are supplying more than enough water to replace the water being left in Mono Basin streams that feed Mono Lake.

The goal of this hearing is to consider methods to ensure a reliable water supply to Southern California regardless of a quick resolution to the Quantification Settlement Agreement, commonly called the QSA. I must add to this goal the need for high quality drinking water in the region.

Current Supplies

Water supplies used in Southern California come from several sources. Those sources include about half from imported water supplies and the other half from local supplies within the coastal plain of Southern California. The imported water sources are from

northern California via the State Water Project (SWP); the Colorado River (CRA); and the Los Angeles Aqueduct (LAA). Local supplies are primarily groundwater and southern California mountain streamflow, recycled, and desalinated brackish groundwater. In addition, the region has successfully reduced demand for water over 15% since the mid-1980s through implementation of conservation Best Management Practices.

State Water Project

MWD has imported an average of 1 MAF from the State Water Project during the past decade. However, during a drought, SWP delivery to MWD can be as low as 400,000 AF. The maximum deliveries to Southern California during wet periods are limited to about 1.7 MAF because of pumping limitations in the State Water Project. The proposed South Delta improvements might increase wet year pumping by approximately 200,000 AF.

Colorado River Deliveries

California has a long-term allocation of 4.4 million acre-feet per year from the Colorado River, with 3.85 MAF allocated to Imperial Irrigation District, Coachella Valley Water District, Palo Verde Irrigation District and the Yuma project, and 550,000 to MWD. In past years, the MWD has imported an additional 700,000 AF of surplus water. The Colorado River delivery to MWD with QSA is about 900,000 AF, compared to historic averages of 1.2 MAF, resulting in keeping the Aqueduct at 80% capacity.

Eastern Sierra Nevada

Los Angeles Department of Water and Power imports between 300,000-400,000 acre-feet of water per year, but in future years it is likely to import less than 200,000 acre-feet on average, because of dust control and restoration obligations in the Owens Valley and the Mono Basin

Drought Imports

If drought occurs throughout California and/or the West, southern California could face importing as little as 1.1 million acre-feet of water. To make up the 50% shortfall, the region must turn to conservation measures, transfers, local groundwater and surface water storage withdrawals, and new local supply projects. In addition most of these supplemental measures can be used to improve water quality, storm water management and address groundwater contamination. These measures will be the focus of my presentation.

Groundwater, Recycled Water, Desalinated Brackish Water

The Southern California region produces on average about 1.3 million-acre feet per year of groundwater. During droughts the groundwater production can increase by approximately 500,000 AF. The region uses approximately 450,000 acre-feet per year of recycled water and 75,000 acre-feet of desalinated brackish water. Both recycled water and desalinated groundwater will increase significantly over the next decade. Recycled water is projected to double to about 900,000 AF over the next ten years, and groundwater desalting will more than double to 200,000 AF by 2015.

Demographics of the Region

Southern California includes the counties of Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura with a population of approximately 19.6 million people. In 2025, the Southern California Association of Governments and the San Diego Association of Governments predict the region's population will be in the range of 26.4 million people. While there is still significant agriculture in the region, the trend is toward greater urbanization.

Methods to Achieve Water Supply Reliability and Water Quality in the Region

In order for Southern California to achieve water supply reliability and water quality in the region, its water agencies and citizens must enhance the current sources of local water supply, as well possibly add new technologies and approaches.

Groundwater

The Southern California region produces on average about 1.3 million-acre feet per year of groundwater, and during droughts an approximately 500,000 AF can be produced. Groundwater storage and conjunctive use are strong candidates for meeting the region's water supply and water quality needs. A recent study by the Association of Groundwater Agencies found over 22 million acre-feet of unused capacity in Southern California groundwater basins, and while much of this capacity may not be feasible, the following groundwater basins are identified as having the potential of an approximately 1 million acre-feet per year increase in annual operational yield for the region: Ventura County Basins, San Fernando Valley, Main San Gabriel Basin, West and Central Basins, Orange County Basin, Chino Basin, San Diego County Basins, Mojave River Basins, and Coachella Valley Basin.

Recycled Water

The region uses approximately 450,000 acre-feet per year of recycled water. An unpublished Bureau of Reclamation Study estimated the region's additional potential is 451,500 acre-feet per year over the next ten years. Now is the time for the Department of the Interior (and the Bureau of Reclamation) and the Congress to increase its financial support of Title XVI grant funding in Southern California. Currently the Bureau of Reclamation has requested only \$12 million in its FY 2004 budget. During the past few years, Congress has appropriated about \$34 million each year. This is the most cost effective investment the Bureau could make in new supplies.

Conservation

Through urban conservation Best Management Practices (BMPs) and strong community-based programs, the region has successfully reduced demand by 15% since the mid-1980s. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) currently estimates conservation savings at 653,800 acre-feet per year. MWD's urban target for 2025 is 1.1 million acre-feet, an additional 446,000 acre-feet per year. And,

in my opinion this target will be surpassed with new and aggressive programs to reduce landscape water use and to target commercial, industrial and institutional customers to use new devices that save water in cooling towers, x-ray machines, spray-rinse valves in commercial kitchens, water brooms, as well as low-flow toilets and landscape savings. In addition, there is opportunity for improvements in some agricultural sectors.

Water Transfers

In 2003, MWD concluded eleven water transfer agreements with Northern California farmers in the amount of 167,200 acre-feet. Not all the offers for water sales were accepted, indicating possibly greater potential in the future.

Contaminant Treatment

Water quality, rather than supply, is likely to be the limiting factor in meeting Southern California's water needs. Source water protection of imported water and local groundwater basins and drinking water quality treatment projects are essential to achieving the water supply and water quality goals of the region.

Brackish Water Desalination

Salt loading in Southern California is a large problem that is growing. A number of agencies desalt approximately 75,000 AF of brackish water to expand the region's water supply, particularly groundwater. By 2015 southern California water agencies estimate this amount will increase to 200,000 AF and will continue to increase as imported water supplies become less reliable. Investments in additional treatment and brine lines will be critical to increasing usable locally impaired water supplies.

Storm Water Runoff

Projects are underway in Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties and at the Inland Empire Utility Agency to examine the potential water supply benefit from capturing and reusing rainfall. For example, it rains 12 inches a year in Los Angeles, and much of this water is shunted off into storm drains. There are demonstration projects in Los Angeles County where schools and institutions have buried cisterns under their landscape and are collecting and filtering storm water for use in future irrigation. There are many, similar opportunities throughout the region.

Watershed Management

There are 40-50 watershed organizations in Southern California. Investments in watershed projects and in building greater capacity of these groups will contribute to better coordination among surface and groundwater suppliers, water quality agencies, development agencies, environmental and business interests. The result should be greater water savings, efficiencies, and improved water quality. The Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, the largest of the watershed organizations in the region, is committed to being able to roll off the State Water Project for three years in a drought if it can implement its watershed plan.

Ocean Desalination

Several water agencies and local jurisdictions are examining the feasibility of ocean desalination. It is estimated that ocean desalination could supply 150,000 acre-feet per year. There is great interest in tapping into ocean water as a source of new water for the region. The State of California has established an ocean desalination task force to look at the feasibility of this approach, and many anticipate this will become a part of the water supply mix for the region in the future. The hurdles for ocean desalination include environmental concerns, growth in previously inaccessible places along the coast, and cost, particularly energy costs.

Environmental Benefits from Local and Regional Water Supply Investments

Wearing my Mono Lake Committee hat, it is also very important that the CalFed Bay Delta Authority work with stakeholders to develop a mechanism to ensure that investments in water supply reliability and water quality described above also have direct benefits to watersheds and aquatic systems in the region and in the Delta. For example, when the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA) sets a goal of being able to roll off the Delta for three years during a drought, there must be a clear way of tracking this benefit back to more water for the Delta ecosystem. Perhaps SAWPA's capacity to meet drought year supplies could be a part of the Environmental Water Account.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share with you the many ways in which the region is attempting to meet its needs over and above the important efforts to find a resolution to the Quantification Settlement Agreement. I will be pleased to answer any questions now or in the future.