



January 29, 2026

E. Joaquin Esquivel, Chair, California State Water Resources Control Board
P.O. Box 100
Sacramento, CA 95812-0100

Dear Chair Esquivel:

It was great to see you at the Groundwater Replenishment Project expansion at the Tillman Plant last October. It's an extraordinary and timely project that will help meet the City of Los Angeles' water needs for many years to come.

Following up on that historic occasion, I wanted to reach out with some suggestions that would underscore the State's long-standing commitment to restore and protect Mono Lake, and the community, ecosystem and cultural resources so innately tied to the lake.

The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) has indicated it will conduct a follow-up hearing this year on the status of the restoration of Mono Lake, and I am writing to encourage a swift, straightforward and impactful process that will decisively and at long last restore the lake level of Mono Lake. This goal has not yet been achieved despite the historic SWRCB decision made more than three decades ago via Decision 1631 (D-1631).

During my tenure as a state Assemblymember from 1980 to 1996, I and others carried legislation and worked diligently to provide the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) the critical tools needed to conserve water and lessen the City's diversion of Mono Lake tributary water.

Over the last three decades I have also served on the State Water Resources Control Board, and until November of last year, as President of the Los Angeles Board of Water and Power Commissioners.

Despite the efforts made at the State level - through legislation and through the hard work of the SWRCB -- there has been little progress in achieving the reasonable, healthy lake level of 6392 feet set by the SWRCB in 1994, when the Board modified LADWP's water license to achieve compliance with California law. This lake level was established to protect Mono Lake's public trust resources, including air quality, water quality, ecosystem health, secure habitat for nesting and migratory birds, and recreational opportunities. Mono Lake recovery is also significant to the heritage and future of the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a tribe.

Richard Katz

At this point in time, I believe it is in the best interest of Los Angeles and the State of California to avoid a prolonged contentious SWRCB hearing. There is a commonsense alternative for meeting the needs of Mono Lake and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) that can be quickly implemented by the State Board - one that:

- Protects the City's water rights;
- Ensures LADWP retains the option to export surface water from the Mono Basin during an emergency or drought situation;
- Enables Mono Lake to rise to the 6392-foot protection level required by the SWRCB in the fastest, most cost-effective manner for Los Angeles ratepayers; and,
- Demonstrates LADWP's commitment to the protection of the Mono Basin environment, including biodiversity, clean air, recreation, and tribal resources while also saving Los Angeles ratepayers from the unnecessary cost of a drawn-out State Water Board proceeding.

Mono Lake level has not risen more than halfway to the 6392-foot level protection requirement over the past 31 years, and remains far short of that requirement, even after the wettest years. It is well established that to raise Mono Lake, more water will need to flow into the lake and less will be diverted by LADWP. Unfortunately, LADWP views a change to the water export criteria as a water supply problem for the city or a permanent loss of water rights in the Mono Basin. This is not the case.

LADWP's recent landmark engineering achievement to double the treatment capacity of the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant to 45 million gallons per day (MGD) provides a unique opportunity to supplement the City's water supply and to restore Mono Lake while protecting the water right interests of the City. This project, which is under construction, will create the rarest of things in the water world a significant amount of NEW POTABLE water.

When the LADWP Board of Commissioners unanimously approved the Los Angeles Groundwater Replenishment Project expansion at the Tillman Plant on October 28, 2025, my fellow commissioners and I agreed that the resulting "new " water presents a unique opportunity to meet the water needs of Los Angeles and at the same time take new action to meet the Department's obligation to raise Mono Lake.

The simple, most effective solution is for LADWP to pause its surface water exports from the Mono Basin, confident that the City has a replacement of 16,000 acre-feet of potable water that LADWP will allow to flow to Mono Lake. Pausing Mono diversions is the fastest and most cost-effective way to raise Mono Lake to the 6392-foot protection level.

- Pausing Mono water diversions will have no impact on the City's water diversion licenses. If necessary, the Water Board could implement the paused diversions as a water license compliance action that has no effect on the underlying Mono Basin water rights held by the City. The Water Board can also provide the necessary legal assurances to the City.
- LADWP Mono Basin diversions could be resumed in the event of an emergency or drought situation. LADWP can use the State Board's Temporary Urgency Change Petition (TUCP)

process to restore surface diversions from Mono Basin if needed. As you know, this is a standard regulatory process used by water agencies throughout the State.

When the Board holds its planned hearing, I strongly urge the Board to modify the Mono Basin licenses to include the following specific points to implement the lake level requirement of D-1631:

- Current Mono Basin Exports. LADWP will pause surface water export until Mono Lake achieves an April 1 surface elevation of 6392 feet.
- Future Mono Basin Exports. When the lake is above 6392 feet, LADWP will have the option to export water, consistent with stream ecosystem flows and other license requirements. If the level of Mono Lake falls below 6392 feet, LADWP will again pause exports.
- Hearing after Mono Lake achieves 6392 level: A future hearing after the lake rises could be planned to consider whether the SWRCB's goals have been achieved, continuing resource monitoring requirements, and whether the concerns of the Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a tribe have been resolved.

The SWRCB hearing process in 2026 could be efficiently and cost-effectively focused on the implementation of the established lake level requirement by using the recycled water produced by the Tillman facility. I encourage the SWRCB to pursue the use of the Tillman facility's new water to offset diversions from Mono Lake to protect the city's water rights and ensure Mono Lake's recovery as intended by the State, the City and the many stakeholders engaged in protecting Mono Lake. Your welcome leadership on this approach provides an elegant, cost-efficient and timely path to resolve the decades-long tension over the critical natural resources of Mono Lake, and I greatly appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,



Richard Katz
President Emeritus, LADWP Board of Commissioners

CC: Members, State Water Resources Control Board
Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, Natural Resources Agency
Chuck Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Yana Garcia, Secretary, CalEPA
Karen Bass, Mayor, City of Los Angeles
Marqueece Harris-Dawson, President, Los Angeles City Council
Members, LADWP Commission
Janise Quinones, Chief Executive Officer, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
Jennifer Kreitz, Chair, Mono County Board of Supervisors
Geoffrey McQuilkin, Executive Director, Mono Lake Committee
Charlotte Lange, Chair, Mono Lake Kootzaduka'a Tribe