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MILK PRODUCERS COUNCIL

13545 Euclid Ave. Ontario, California 909-628-6018 ph 909-591-7328 fx

June 24, 1998

CALFED Bay-Delta Program
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814
Attn: Mr. Lester Snow

Re: Formal Comments on the CALFED Bay-Delta Program EIS/EIR

Dear Mr. Snow;

These formal comments are submitted on behalf of Milk Producers Council, a dairy farmer trade association with about 200 members located primarily in Southern and Central California.

We commend CALFED for the progress that has been made. You have diligently examined every possible option for dealing with the problems of the Bay-Delta. From the beginning you established the right objectives for the CALFED Bay-Delta Program, that being Ecosystem Quality, Water Supply, Water Quality and the Vulnerability of Delta Functions.

The Nature of the Decision:

The first point we will address is relevant to a paper produced by CALFED dated May 7, 1998 titled "Nature of Decision/Selecting a Preferred Alternative". This paper outlines the potential range of the nature of the decision. We strongly believe that CALFED MUST choose a specific alternative and all the components for implementation now. The Alternative CALFED chooses must be the BEST Alternative to meet ALL of the objectives. CALFED must propose a complete solution based on the best scientific information currently available. Obviously at any one point in time it can be said that there are still things to learn. However CALFED has diligently investigated every conceivable possibility and produced a short list of alternatives based on the best available knowledge and a specific preferred alternative must be selected that will meet the objectives. Anything less than a specific proposal will leave the process unfocused and susceptible to death by inertia. There will be no confidence by the stakeholders in the integrity of the process if CALFED fails to meet its long stated commitment to produce a preferred alternative by the end of 1998. If CALFED, after spending millions of dollars and several intensive years of study will not make the tough decision on a specific preferred alternative now, stakeholders will vote with their feet and begin to scatter off to protect "their piece of the world."

It is always easier in the short term to defer the tough decisions, but there is a strong expectation by the public that CALFED will produce a solution, based on the best available science that will meet all the objectives. If CALFED does not produce a specific solution, but only proposes a process for how to get a solution, people will conclude that no solution will be forthcoming and they will begin to focus their time and effort on parochial concerns. **The consensus for collaborative effort will dissolve and our generation's historic opportunity to secure California's water future will be lost.**

The Alternatives:

In our opinion, the only alternative that will meet the objectives of CALFED is Alternative 3. All the alternatives will to some extent improve the Ecosystem Quality of the Delta, but only Alternative 3 will assure reduced conflicts with the fish. The other two alternatives still leave fish vulnerable to the pumps in the Southern Delta, which as we know has been the source of major conflicts in the past. There is ample evidence and experience to teach us that the current configuration of the Delta which would continue under Alternative 1 and would still remain substantially in place under Alternative 2 will leave the fish flowing to the pumps. It is that dead end at the pumps that has been the source of most of the fisheries problems in the delta. It would be irresponsible of CALFED to propose an alternative after all this time and effort that did not change this fatal flaw of the current Delta configuration.

Because it opens up pumping opportunities as a result of reduced fishery impacts, Alternative 3 clearly provides the best assurance of increased Water Supply opportunities. With California's population projected to grow significantly over the next 40 years, increasing the Water Supply is a vital objective for the CALFED program. Whether it is increased water transfer opportunities between willing buyers and sellers or the development of new water through increased storage, only Alternative 3 can assure that increased water supplies can actually be dependably delivered to the areas of the state that need it.

Alternative 3 is also the best solution to Water Quality challenges that face much of Southern California. We have specific experience in dealing with water quality problems in the Chino Basin where many of our member's dairy farms are located. The Chino Basin hold great potential for conjunctive use but suffers from water quality degradation which has developed over the decades. The condition of the Chino Basin is such that it is no longer permissible to bring in Colorado River water because its TDS level is too high. The good news is that the leadership, both urban and agriculture in Chino Basin is committed to improving our basin so that it can be utilized to its maximum potential. The main way the Basin will be cleaned up is through the extraction and cleanup of the poor quality water and the importation into the Basin of good quality State Project water. We understand that the isolated facility proposed in Alternative 3 will produce a water quality improvement over the current conveyance configuration of 100 parts/ml of TDS. This difference is vital to creating the opportunity to utilize the Chino Basin as a conjunctive use resource for all of Southern California. The 100 TDS improvement in water quality from Alternative 3 also greatly increases the opportunity to maximize water recycling. The potential to economically use water more than once is directly related to its original quality. Others will quantify the economics of this issue,

but it is huge and Alternative 3 is the only alternative that can assure Southern California of these vital benefits. There is also a real drinking water treatment benefit to starting with a better quality imported water. Others will spell it out and quantify it in their comments, but we totally support those comments and associate ourselves with them.

On the issue of Delta System Vulnerability, again Alternative 3 emerges head and shoulders above the other 2 alternatives. It is frankly shocking that our great state is so dependent on a levy system that is so vulnerable to earthquakes. Our current system is pumping from below sea level and only separated from the Pacific Ocean by fresh water outflows and peat soil levies which were not built or designed to do the function they currently perform. No business would long survive or tolerate the system vulnerability that the entire State of California endures in the current configuration of the Delta. Alternative 1 and 2 do virtually nothing to change this underlying flaw. That in and of itself should disqualify them from consideration. Only Alternative 3 will assure a level of system flexibility which will significantly reduce Delta System Vulnerability.

Needs of the California Dairy Industry:

We also comment on the specific needs of the dairy industry in California. Our industry supports billions of dollars of economic activity from the farms that grow the feed for our cattle to eat, all the way through to the distributors and retailers who sell California produced cheese, yogurt and ice cream. The success of the dairy industry depends in large measure on an adequate forage supply and a successful general economy. Both of those things are directly tied to a reliable water supply, the key to which is a "fixed" Delta. If the objectives of the CALFED program are not met, the dairy industry will suffer along with the rest of the California economy. In the scramble to meet urban needs, more water will be transferred away from agriculture than would be prudent. Remember that all those new people coming into California over the next 40 years not only need water to drink, they also need food to eat. Agriculture provides the food. It would be very short sighted to believe that water can be transferred away from agriculture to supply the urban direct use needs of the population without having an adverse effect on California agriculture's ability to feed those same people.

Conclusions:

It is clear that Alternative 3 is the only Alternative that will meet the objectives of the CALFED program. All of the Alternatives will be expensive but only one will solve the problems. Since Southern California is likely to be asked to pick up the lions share of the costs of the CALFED solution, we are putting you on notice that Southern California will be unwilling to finance anything less than a complete and specific solution. If CALFED does not produce a complete and specific proposal that meets the objectives of the program then Southern California would be much better off spending its money elsewhere. If CALFED, after all of this time and effort cannot produce a solution driven by objective facts and good science then we can have no confidence that it will produce a solution in the years to come. CALFED will then become just another failed attempt to deal with California's water future. NOW IS THE TIME TO PRODUCE.

We support the CALFED approach outlined by Governor Wilson and Interior Secretary Babbitt earlier this month. This approach commits to a single specific CALFED preferred alternative with staged implementation. We have no problem with staged implementation provided there is a commitment to doing a complete program which meets all of the CALFED objectives. While others will no doubt focus in their comments on proposing a whole host of near term actions like the establishment of conjunctive use programs, various fish screening efforts, habitat expansion, etc., our view is that in addition to the short term "fixes" work must immediately commence on planning for the surface storage and conveyance components contained in Alternative 3. We do not have time to waste. The lead time on these major projects is very long and in order for the public to have confidence that the problems will be solved in time to avert a crisis in the Delta the work on these projects must begin now.

As many have said the Delta is the hub of the California water system. Water is the lifeblood of California. The work of CALFED is vital to the future of our state. You must not fail. You must have courage. The public expects and has a right to demand a complete solution to the objectives of the CALFED program. This can only be accomplished through Alternative 3. We urge you to do just that.

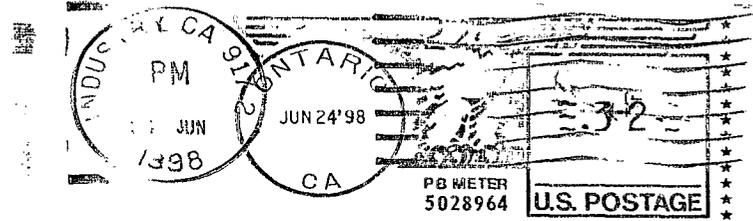
Sincerely,



Geoffrey Vanden Heuvel
Director

Milk Producers Council

13545 Euclid Avenue, Ontario, California 91761
Phone: (909) 628-6018 • FAX: (909) 591-7328



CALFED Bay-Delta Program
Mr. Lester Snow
1416 Ninth St., Suite 1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

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