

STATEMENT OF HOWARD R. FRICK  
April 18, 1996

at the  
CALFED Bay-Delta Program Scoping Meeting  
Bakersfield, California

Good evening. My name is Howard Frick. I am the President of the Board of Directors of Arvin Edison Water Storage District and Kern Delta Water District and I have been asked to appear tonight on behalf of those Districts. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the joint programmatic EIS/EIR for the CALFED Bay Delta program.

The Kern Delta Water District is a public agency providing agricultural water service to approximately 125,000 acres of prime agricultural land in Kern County, California. The District serves some 2500 landowners, primarily using native waters from the Kern River and the groundwater basin. The District's native water supply is supplemented with State Water Project water for which it has contracted through the Kern County Water Agency. The Kern Delta Water District is vitally interested in the impact of any CALFED Bay Delta program on the State Water Project water supply of the Kern County Water Agency because we share in that water supply. Accordingly, we support, endorse and adopt the comments of the Kern County Water Agency on this subject.

The Arvin Edison Water Storage District, like Kern Delta, is a public agency providing agricultural water service to approximately 130,000 acres of prime agricultural land, in Kern County, California. Arvin Edison serves some 1200 landowners, primarily with native water from the groundwater basin

supplemented by water imported from the Friant Unit of the Central Valley Project and from the Central Valley Project contractors whose water comes through the Delta and to Arvin-Edison by exchange through the Cross Valley Canal. The Arvin Edison Water Storage District is vitally interested in the impact of any CALFED Bay Delta program on either the State Water Project or the Central Valley Project. Accordingly, Arvin Edison supports, endorses and adopts the comments of both the Kern County Water Agency and the Friant Water Users Authority on this subject.

In addition to adopting the more specific comments of the Kern County Water Agency and the Friant Water Users Authority, I would like to make some general observations of my own. I speak to you from my perspective as a family farmer whose family has been farming in the Southern San Joaquin Valley for over 75 years; from my perspective as a long time member of the boards of directors of Arvin Edison and Kern Delta; and from my perspective as a member of the BDAC Advisory Committee.

I've heard it said that we need to restore the Bay-Delta habitat. My first question is: restore it to what? A true restoration to pre-modern day conditions would require removing the Delta island levees and letting the River flow unimpeded for several million years. That's not too practical. I suggest we take the Delta as we find it today and start working on habitat management rather than restoration. My second question is: who is going to pay for this? Whether we're talking restoration or

management, someone has to pick up the tab. In my opinion everyone should contribute but water exporters should not be the primary source of funding. Water exports did not cause the building of levees, nor the loss of peat soils, nor the lowering of ground elevations that have occurred in the Delta -- so water exporters should not have primary responsibility for fixing these problems.

I've heard it said that we need "Demand Management". To me, demand management is just another way of saying "water rationing." And who bears the brunt of water rationing? Agriculture. This is just plain wrong. First of all, it violates the most basic and fundamental principle guiding the CALFED process: that the three water interests -- urban, agricultural and environmental -- would be dealt with even-handedly, avoiding redirected impacts. Secondly, it is economic suicide for our State. Demand management could take 800,000 acres of the most productive agricultural land in the world out of production. That's almost the equivalent of wiping out irrigated agriculture in all of Kern County. The State of California's revenue from agriculture is almost three times the revenue of any other State. The San Joaquin Valley's irrigated agriculture is intensive. I contend this is a boon to the environment. We use imported water, commercial fertilizer, pesticides and many other modern technologies to maximize per acre production. If we did not, and throughout the country other farmers did not, you would have to have tens of millions of acres

of additional land tilled which would have to come from forests, grasslands and wetlands just to maintain the same total production for today's demand for food and fibre. Reducing California's agricultural production will reduce our exports, hurting our balance of payments deficit, and will increase our dependence on imports from Mexico and other foreign countries. Don't we have enough economic problems in this State already? It just makes no sense to further degrade the State's economy by forcing a reduction in agricultural production.

I've heard it said that farmers need to "conserve" water. I tell you it is a fallacy to think that agriculture can generate a new water supply through conservation. For that to be true you must assume that agriculture is currently wasting water; and I assure you it is not. Water is too precious and too expensive for farmers to even consider wasting it. In fact, DWR has estimated farm water efficiencies in some portions of the San Joaquin Valley so high that any improvement is undesirable because it would create salt balance problems. Even so, if agricultural water is applied in excess of immediate crop needs, that excess is not wasted. The water returns to the groundwater basin where it is available for later reuse. To me, if you want to talk conservation, I suggest we impose the same standards of efficiency on environmental uses as are currently employed by farmers.

I support voluntary transfers of water. I think it is a good idea. I don't think transfers should be mandated; the

market place should determine where the water will be used. However, I don't think water transfers provide a Delta solution. Some may think of water transfers as moving water from areas of surplus to areas of shortage. That is not the case. In the Southern San Joaquin Valley there is persistent shortage. Water transfers merely move the shortage from one place to another. It is the shortage that gives rise to our Delta demands, and water transfers will not alleviate that shortage.

I support conjunctive use of available water supplies. This is another activity that is occurring on a local basis and has been occurring for many years. Arvin Edison has operated a project based on wet year spreading and dry year recovery for almost 30 years now and we intend to increase these operations. But conjunctive use programs are limited in practicality because they are expensive to build and operate. Like water transfers, conjunctive use programs will not provide a Delta solution. Conjunctive use programs help farmers manage their water shortages, but do not alleviate them.

In conclusion I just want to say that the CVP and SWP provide many millions of dollars each year for environmental improvements now. Urban and agricultural water users are entitled to more water for these investments, not less. Yet none of the suggested alternatives seem to improve water supplies south of the Delta. This has got to change. Agriculture in the San Joaquin Valley must have an affordable, reliable water supply or California will have a less productive economy; we will have

to rely on imports rather than enjoying the fruits of our agricultural trade surpluses; and we will have to make do with less than top quality food and fiber. The choice is ours. Let us choose wisely.

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