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August 16, 2016

Assemblymember Toni G. Atkins
California State Assembly
1350 Front Street, Suite 6054
San Diego, CA 92101

RE: Otay Mesa Conveyance and Disinfection System Project

Dear Honorable Assemblymember ^{Toni} Atkins:

It is my pleasure to provide a response to a letter dated July 29, 2016, from Wildcoast and the San Diego Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation regarding the Otay Water District's application for approval of the Otay Mesa Conveyance and Disinfection System Project.

The Otay Water District (Otay) serves over 222,000 customers in the communities of Otay Mesa, Chula Vista, Jamul, Spring Valley, and Rancho San Diego in southeastern San Diego County, California. Otay is entrusted with meeting the challenges of providing safe and reliable water supplies in the face of severe, persistent drought and the continuing prospect of adapting to declining traditional water supplies from a changing climate. Per the District's 2007 Water Resources Master Plan update, Otay's long-term planning includes conservation and diversification of water resources to reduce its dependence on overextended traditional water supplies imported from the Colorado River and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Otay has proposed the Otay Mesa Conveyance and Disinfection System Project (Project), an approximately four-mile long potable water pipeline and metering station in the County of San Diego just north of the international border, to import and convey desalinated potable water from a connection point at the United States-Mexico border to Otay's existing reservoir. The Project requires a Presidential Permit from the U.S. Department of State to allow the pipeline to cross the international border and is subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

The international border between the United States and Mexico has long been a unique place where people, manufactured goods, and energy cross the border daily to meet the needs of communities in the United States and Mexico. Otay's Project would allow desalinated potable water from Mexico to meet the potable water demand of up to two-thirds of Otay's customers. Diversifying Otay's water resources with desalinated potable water from Mexico is clearly in the national interest, in light of California and the West's persisting water challenges.

Tijuana faces similar water supply challenges as we do in the San Diego region, including reliance on Colorado River water and on a very small local supply from wells and reservoirs. Like San Diego County, Tijuana and the State of Baja have a long-term strategy to diversify its water supply, reducing reliance on other diminishing supply sources. Seawater desalination, a high-quality drought-proof supply, is part of this strategy.

Cost efficiency has been factored into this process and strategy. Through a robust, competitive tender process, the State of Baja selected a company to develop the project under a public/private partnership. The resulting cost of the desalinated water is less expensive than the current Colorado River supply and significantly less expensive than reusing sewer water.

Otay is aware of the efforts of Wildcoast and the Surfrider Foundation, detailed in their letter dated July 29, 2016, to confuse the requested Presidential Permit approval for Otay's four-mile Conveyance and Disinfection System Project with the two organizations' interest in full reclamation of semi-treated and untreated wastewater discharged at San Antonio de Los Buenos (SAB)/Punta Bandera in Mexico to remedy contamination of beaches along the California/Baja California coastline.

The problem of beach contamination from wastewater discharge has been the subject of many decades of attention by the International Boundary and Water Commission, and it is wholly separate and unrelated to the application of the Otay Water District for approval of the Conveyance and Disinfection System Project. The problem of untreated and semi-treated wastewater and beach contamination is real in our region, but the effort by Wildcoast and Surfrider to oppose Otay's use of desalinated water from Mexico, in the hopes of solving the decades-old sewage and beach contamination problem, is misguided.

N.S.C. Agua, S.A. de D.V. (NSC), a private Mexican company who will design, build and operate the desalination plant in Rosarito, has engaged engineering groups with extensive regional and/or technical experience to prepare the environmental impact studies for local, state and federal regulatory agencies in Mexico, regarding the desalination plant in Rosarito, Mexico. The associated potable water pipeline and other infrastructure for that project were subject to an environmental process on the Mexican side, which did include a public comment period between late May and mid-June 2014. Interested parties had the opportunity to participate in that process. According to the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) Resolution approving the Manifestación de Impacto Ambiental (MIA), "no public comments, information requests, complaints, lawsuits, or written comments of any kind were submitted by a member of society, government agency, or organization in reference to the project."

To clarify, Otay's Project does not include the proposed desalination plant in Rosarito, the associated potable water pipeline to move water from the facility to serve potential customers in Mexico, or other related infrastructure in Mexico.

The Otay Water District looks forward to working with the U.S. Department of State and gladly welcomes any questions or comments that you might have on this important project.

Sincerely,



Mark Watton
General Manager
Otay Water District

CC:

Barbara Boxer, United States Senator
Diane Feinstein, United States Senator
Juan Vargas, United States Congressman

Scott Peters, United States Congressman
Susan Davis, United States Congresswoman
Ben Hueso, California State Senator
Lorena Gonzales, California Assemblymember
Kevin Faulconer, Mayor of San Diego
David Alvarez, City of San Diego Councilmember
Greg Cox, San Diego County Supervisor
Roberta S. Jacobson, United States Ambassador to Mexico
William A. Ostick, Consul General Tijuana, U.S. Consulate Tijuana
Edward Drusina, Commissioner, International Boundary and Water Commission
Marcela Celorio, Consul General San Diego, Mexican Consul San Diego
Gerónimo Gutiérrez Fernández, Director, North American Development Bank
Mark West, Chair, Surfrider San Diego County Chapter
Zachary Plopper, Conservation Director, WILD COAST
Alexis Strauss, Acting Regional Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency Region 9
Matt Rodriguez, California Secretary for Environmental Protection
Felicia Marcus, Chair, San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board
David Gibson, Executive Director, San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board