

**Testimony of Jeffrey Kightlinger, General Manager
Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
"Perspectives on California Water Supply: Challenges
and Opportunities"**

**House Subcommittee on Water and Power
Congresswoman Grace F. Napolitano,
Chairwoman, House Subcommittee on Water and
Power**

Los Angeles, January 25, 2010

Chairwoman Napolitano:

On behalf of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, thank you for convening this hearing to explore and address the water supply challenges facing this region and to share Metropolitan's action plan for addressing a worsening problem that threatens communities, businesses and farms throughout this state.

Southern California has experienced its first year of region-wide mandatory conservation since 1991 because of Metropolitan's decision last year to reduce deliveries to its 26 member agencies in six counties.

Metropolitan imports supplies from the Colorado River and from Northern California via the State Water Project. Three years of below-average rainfall throughout the state, combined with new restrictions on State Water Project supplies because of the deterioration and collapse of the ecosystem in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, has resulted in the need to reduce supplies for 19 million Southern Californians and for residents throughout the state.

Because of aggressive efforts and outreach by Metropolitan and our member public agencies there is widespread awareness about California's water problems and our residents and businesses have risen to the challenge and significantly reduced their water use. For example, water use has been reduced in Southern California by over 15% throughout the region; some areas are even quite higher. But despite the welcome recent

rains and the good effort on local conservation, the underlying crisis remains and will be readily apparent in the months and years ahead.

Southern California like much of the state faces ongoing shortage or near-shortage conditions because of the problems in the Delta. Metropolitan's initial allocation of supplies from the State Water Project for the coming year is 5 percent of a full delivery. That is the lowest initial allocation in the history of the Project. We hope and anticipate this allocation to increase in the weeks ahead, but the question is: by how much? Metropolitan's board of directors is scheduled to discuss and make a decision at its meeting in April to determine the amount of water it can deliver to its member agencies this year. The recent rains did not wash away our water problems – or, the state's problems, and the possibility of continued shortage conditions is quite real.

Many of us who have been following water issues for decades have been accustomed to a quick bounce-back in deliveries from the State Water Project when the drought cycle ends and the rains return. But this pattern will no longer hold true. New water supply restrictions because of deteriorating environmental conditions in the Delta will have their greatest impact in wet and average years. Metropolitan will lose the ability to capture as much as 600,000 acre-feet of water in above-average and wet years because of these restrictions. This is water that normally would replenish the groundwater basins in Los Angeles, the San Gabriel Valley and Orange County that desperately need replenishment. Some of these aquifers are at or near their lowest groundwater elevations in recorded history. That is unacceptable. As a region and a state, we must find a way to capture adequate supplies in wet years in order to withstand the inevitable dry cycles. The key to this solution lies in addressing the crisis in the Delta.

In the short term, all water supply restrictions must be based on sound science, while every effort is made to find the means to ease these environmental restrictions without harming fish populations. Three years of reduced water deliveries from the State Water Project have not reversed the collapse of the ecosystem, a compelling sign that ecosystem restoration and a strategy to address other stressors is essential.

For the longer-term, the key to the Delta challenge relies in combining ecosystem improvements with water conveyance improvements. This strategy is now emerging

through the state-federal effort known as the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. It is absolutely essential that the Interior Department stay on track and produce a draft environmental impact statement for the BDCP this year.

For Metropolitan, it will be vital to maintain our ongoing efforts to maximize the available supplies from the Colorado River, which faces its own challenges as it recovers from record drought. The conservation ethic of our residents will have to continue now and into the future and we will have to look for new and innovative ways to treat, manage and increase the use of recycled water to ensure the most efficient use of our limited supplies. Title XVI projects will be pivotal in bridging the gap between the problems we have today and the implementation of a long-term Delta solution. Equally important is the acceptance that improving the quality and reliability of our water, from improving treatment to addressing the crisis in the Delta, comes at a cost that will result in higher rates. Even so, our supplies remain well under a penny a gallon for some of the highest quality water for any major metropolitan region on earth. We have major challenges ahead of us. But we do have ways to solve them. Thank you Chairwoman Napolitano for your continued leadership on water issues on behalf of this region.