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20TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA
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BIOTECHNOLOGY AND FOREIGN AGRICULTURE
RANKING MEMBER

May 16, 2012

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

This letter is to call your attention to the water crisis that still exists in my District and throughout California. At a recent House Committee on Natural Resources oversight hearing on the President's Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Proposal, you may remember me highlighting the fact that California was experiencing a very dry winter and heading for low water deliveries to south of Delta contractors in the San Joaquin Valley unless the Department of the Interior (Interior) took urgent and deliberate actions to secure more reliable supplies for the region. This year, projected water supply allocations to agricultural water service contractors in my District started out at 30% and have now only gone up to 40% of contracted amounts since April. While it may rain more throughout California this year and that number may eventually increase, it is safe to suspect that 40% is the number that farmers on the Westside of the Valley can take to the bank to secure loans and plan for the season. At the same time, many other contractors throughout the state stand at 100% of their contracted water supplies. Clearly, many challenges remain.

With the last three year drought always fresh in our memory, I can't help but question whether Interior is operating under the "lessons learned" category or starting to veer off course. With the help of our California Senators, Congressman Cardoza, and local water agencies, we set so many processes in place in 2009 and in the years since: the drought relief actions list, the interim federal action plan, the supplemental water supply initiative in 2010, actions for operational flexibility at the federal and state pumps, and even renewing efforts with respect to the Bay Delta Conservation Plan (BDCP) that will be the long-term solution to these challenges.

Some of those efforts have borne fruit, such as the Intertie project that came online recently and the operational flexibility Interior exercised in 2010 which allowed the water supply allocation to increase. Yet, for all this planning and process, I would argue that my constituents still have had to fight tooth and nail for every single drop of water since the last drought. This does no justice to the vision that inspired our nation's leaders to build the Central Valley Project to provide more reliable water and power supplies to a region that arguably would not exist without it. And it does not put us on a path to long-term recovery.

Although I recognize that Reclamation Commissioner Mike Connor and Mid-Pacific Regional Director Don Glaser have been working very hard and I appreciate their engagement

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and willingness to work with me, I fear that we are not building on our previous efforts and are planning to no end. A most recent example was California Natural Resources Agency Secretary Laird's decision – in conjunction with Deputy Secretary Hayes – to delay the release of draft public documents on the BDCP, from June to September of this year. As you know, this is likely to further push back any final environmental documents on the project that were targeted for completion in February of 2013.

In the course of a six year process of the BDCP, a couple more months of delay may not appear to be a major cause for concern. But, if my thirty years of working on these issues has shown me anything, it is that “kicking the can down the road” hurts Californians and does a great disservice to our children and grandchildren who will be faced with even bigger burdens if we continue to wait. Just imagine how different California would have been today if we had built a Peripheral Canal when it first came before voters in 1982! And, yet here we are, still trying to perfect the science, be certain of every single contingency, and simply unable to make the toughest policy calls and have the leadership necessary to make this project a reality.

Mr. Secretary, I recognize that our water problems did not develop overnight. In fact, I just came across a document from June of 2000 entitled, “California's Water Future: A Framework for Action” that was developed by the Cal-Fed Bay Delta Program. This 57 page document was partially a response to the brutal 1987-1992 drought that similarly devastated the San Joaquin Valley and brought stakeholders to the table so we could “all get healthy together again.” In that very document, the relevant agencies were directed to develop a drought contingency plan to reduce the impacts of critical water shortages to water contractors. It discusses storage studies and infrastructure improvements, conservation, and basically all of the same things we talk about and plan for today. And, over a decade later, we're still talking about and planning for the same things. We have to do more and we must move quickly. The status quo is not sustainable, and heaven forbid should an earthquake come and disrupt the conveyance system that supplies water to 25 million Californians.

Now is the time for action, and I stand ready to support you if you are willing to use all of your discretion and best judgment to lead and make the most critical policy decisions affecting my constituents and California.

Sincerely,



JIM COSTA

Member of Congress

Cc: Secretary John Laird, California Natural Resources Agency