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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0511

January 6, 2009

Nancy Sutley, Council on Environmental Quality Chair designee
Obama-Biden Presidential Transition Headquarters
451 6th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Ms. Sutley,

Congratulations on your nomination to serve as chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. I look forward to working with you as we address some of our nation's most pressing air and water quality concerns.

One issue of particular importance is the crisis that faces the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the West Coast's largest estuary and the hub of California's water distribution system. The Delta provides not only potable water to tens of millions of Californians, but some of the most fertile agricultural land in the state as well as innumerable recreational activities and a habitat to hundreds of species, including several on the endangered species list.

As you know from your service on the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California Board as well as the California State Water Resources Control Board, the Delta is in serious trouble. Over the years, the use of the Delta for a variety of purposes, particularly as a statewide water supply system, has dramatically jeopardized the health of the estuary. Today, the Delta ecosystem is faced with unprecedented threats, including a collapsed fishery, invasive species, declining water quality, flood risks and aging and failure-prone levees. Recent drought conditions are exacerbating this situation and bringing increased threats to our water supply.

In attempting to address these problems and to continue providing a reliable water supply across the state, dramatic changes to the Delta, which would irreversibly alter the region, are being considered. The Delta Vision Committee just last week announced support for building a canal to divert water around the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, a so-called "alternative conveyance."

There is no question that we have to figure out a sensible way to ensure the health of the Delta and provide water for agricultural, industrial, and residential uses statewide. But I am concerned that a conveyance system to divert water around the estuary, in any form,

will destroy the Delta ecosystem and with it the agriculture and commerce, including the nation's second largest inland port, the region supports.

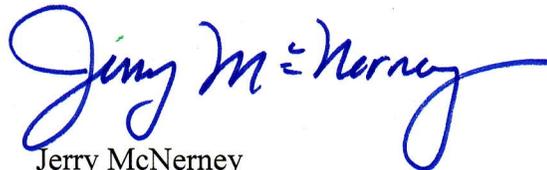
With the power and responsibility to oversee multiple aspects of Delta land and water management, the federal government has a large role to play in determining the future of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

In executing federal water policy in the region, I ask that you fully and accurately investigate the viability of an alternative conveyance, taking into account the serious consequences should such a policy be implemented. Concerns have already been raised about the Public Policy Institute of California's benchmark analysis and recommendation regarding a new conveyance system to circumvent the Delta.

Additionally, I implore you to pursue other water management strategies that would negate the need for an alternative conveyance around the Delta, including water reuse, conservation, recycling, reclamation and perhaps even additional surface storage.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is not only critically important to those who live, recreate and farm in the Delta region, but to citizens across California and our nation. I look forward to working with you over the coming months as we move expeditiously to address the health of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Sincerely,



Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress