

Testimony

Provided By

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On

The Immediate Federal and State Role in
Addressing Uncertain Water Deliveries for California
and Impacts on California Communities

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House Subcommittee on Water and Power
"The Immediate Federal and State Role in Addressing Uncertain Water Deliveries
for California and Impacts on California Communities"

Oral Testimony by Jeffrey Kightlinger, General Manager
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Thank you Chairwoman Napolitano. I am pleased to give you and the subcommittee a brief survey of the impacts being felt throughout Southern California from the evolving water situation and Metropolitan's response. We face a new reality and new roles for Metropolitan and the state and federal governments to bringing more certainty to our water future.

At the moment we are roughly on track for an average rainfall year in both Southern California and Northern California. Traditionally this was good news. Traditionally this would mean that Metropolitan would likely receive enough water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to meet local demands and make modest additions to our storage reserves.

But not this year. Because of ongoing environmental problems in the Delta, there are court-ordered curtailments in water deliveries that started late last year and are expected to last into June. At the moment, the State Water Project has committed to delivering 25 percent of water supplies to its contractors throughout California. This percentage may increase, but Metropolitan is making preparations for a significant cutback in supplies. Metropolitan is responding by seeking to purchase additional supplies on the open market and funding a \$6 million dollar water use efficiency outreach campaign to encourage conservation throughout our service area. In addition, Metropolitan's board of directors has approved over \$30 million to aggressively implement water conservation and recycled hook-ups for public agencies and the commercial and industrial sectors. Our tracking polls suggest that nearly half of the 18 million people in our service area have gotten the message and are taking steps to lower water use. This is helpful. Along with our efforts to creatively manage our resources, Metropolitan also invested in efforts to increase our storage capacity. In fact, today we have 10 times the amount of water in storage than we did during the last drought in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This includes a \$2 billion capital investment in the building of Diamond Valley Lake, which alone nearly doubled the region's surface water storage capacity. Those reserves provide a cushion and give us some time. But, with the new restrictions in the Delta, we are now living on that borrowed time. That realization, and the uncertainties in the Delta, are beginning to create water supply impacts throughout the region.

Metropolitan, working with its member agencies, is developing a plan to equitably allocate our available State Water Project supplies from the Delta, the Colorado River Aqueduct and water stored in reserves. The primary objective of the plan is to minimize the impact on the overall regional economy. We are also striving to strike a balance recognizing needs from MWD, accounting for local supply and rewarding local districts that lower demands and increase supplies. A sterling example is Orange County. Last week it celebrated the opening of one of the largest water recycling facilities in the world. This facility will turn wastewater that used to drain into the Pacific Ocean into a reliable

high-quality drinking water supply that will help replenish the local groundwater basin. Metropolitan provided incentive funds to help make this project a reality. This is precisely the kind of strategic regional partnership that Metropolitan is working to replicate throughout our service area.

In the coming weeks and months, Metropolitan will review existing and new programs to lower demand and increase local supplies. We will be doing this despite rapidly rising costs from the State Water Project and other investments, which will likely require double-digit rate increases into the future. We continue to identify and implement new ways to lower demand and increase local supplies because we have seen the dramatic results of past efforts. And we are re-evaluating and updating our long-term water strategy, our Integrated Resources Plan, to determine if our conservation and local water supply targets should be even more ambitious.

To ensure our long-term plans are taking into account the impacts of climate change, Metropolitan has entered into a partnership with the RAND Corporation to develop appropriate planning models and protocols that would take into account long-term impacts on water supplies. The state has taken a leadership role with its energy policy, which is focused on landmark efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and working to ensure a better linkage between water and energy. Conserving water helps reduce the need to transport and treat water, which are energy-consuming activities. Metropolitan is evaluating its carbon footprint in tandem with our water supply and planning efforts. While there is much still to be done when it comes to water conservation, it is important to recognize how far Southern California has come. As an example, in the past 15 years Metropolitan has invested more than \$200 million in water-conserving devices. These conservation investments, combined with plumbing code reforms, reduce our potential demands by about a million acre-feet per year. Had we not been this successful in lowering demand and simply expected the State Water Project to solve the region's problems, our demand on the Delta would be about 50 percent larger now. Given the multiple changing conditions due to climate change, endangered species rulings and other impacts in the Delta, Metropolitan has embarked upon a comprehensive update of its long-term Integrated Resources Plan. A renewed focus on the development of local resource projects will help decrease our dependency on the Delta. But we do need a more reliable supply from the Delta than the current system is providing. And we embrace the notion that restoring the health of this ecosystem is an essential ingredient to creating a more reliable water system.

How can the federal government help? We urge the federal agencies to remain active and engaged participants in the Delta. We need a new biological opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that will guide the operations of the State Water Project and the Central Valley Project. Metropolitan is actively seeking operational strategies that can help reduce conflicts between pumping operations and fish migration patterns. We also need the active participation of the federal wildlife agencies in coming up with a new Bay Delta Conservation Plan, which is exploring new and better ways to separate the movement of water supplies from the natural flows in the estuary. Yes, that may mean some form of a canal as one piece of a much larger solution. We need the feasibility studies and better science to understand new ways of moving water supplies. The deliberations ahead should be based on new facts and not old fears. Metropolitan has made a commitment to seek reliability from Delta supplies, and to find the water for new

growth from within our service area, a historic difference between the emerging Delta discussion and debates of the past. Metropolitan urges the federal government – our elected officials, federal agencies and staff – to support our local resource projects including recycling and other conservation programs.

As for assistance from the state, while we recognize the challenging fiscal situation, there are ways that the state can help. Metropolitan seeks to sponsor or support state legislation that would create a standard approach for regional water boards to authorize water recycling projects that seek to store supplies in groundwater basins. There are hundreds of millions of dollars from bonds that voters have already approved that are available to address parts of the Delta problem and to help regions become more self-sufficient.

Metropolitan remains a constructive and realistic participant to bring about dramatic and historic change in the Delta. We are very pleased to have the interest and involvement of both the state and federal governments to solve our problems and a collective recognition that the Delta as we know and manage it today is a broken ecosystem that needs fixing.

Thank you Chairwoman for today's hearing and I would be happy to respond to any questions.