



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901



Jeanine Townsend
Clerk to the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
P.O. Box 100
Sacramento, California 95812

RE: Draft Stay Order for the Central Coast Water Board's Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements Order No. R3-2012-0011

Dear Ms. Townsend:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Stay Order. EPA strongly supports the Central Coast Regional Board's efforts to improve its Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program by issuing Conditional Waivers to further protect and restore surface and groundwater quality in the Central Coast. There are many surface and groundwater areas of concern in the Central Coast. The nitrate contamination of groundwater in the Salinas Valley has recently been highlighted by a UC Davis Report¹ and presents a grave threat to public health. Additionally, many impairments to surface waters in agricultural areas in the Central Coast are documented in California's 2010 Clean Water Act §303(d) List and include: toxicity, pesticides, nutrients, turbidity and pathogens². The Central Coast Conditional Waiver's approach to addressing these important public health and environmental concerns by prioritizing the control of pollutant loading from growers most likely to impact surface and groundwater quality is commendable.

The Water Boards are recognized as national innovators in utilizing regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to address agriculture-related water quality issues in a manner consistent with maintaining a thriving agricultural sector. The Central Coast Regional Board's Conditional Waiver serves as a national model to address agricultural discharges and is consistent with California's federally approved nonpoint source management program under Clean Water Act §319.

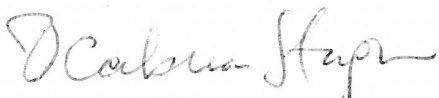
National experience indicates that nonpoint source pollution can be more effectively addressed when implementation of management practices is informed by TMDLs and watershed

¹ Harter, T and J. Lund, January 2012, Addressing Nitrate in California's Drinking Water: With a Focus on Tulare Lake Basin and Salinas Valley Groundwater, Report for the State Water Resources Control Board Report to the Legislature <http://groundwaternitrate.ucdavis.edu/>

² http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/tmdl/integrated2010.shtml

plans. The focus of this Conditional Waiver on 303(d) listed water bodies is consistent with this approach. The combination of good data, local stewardship and accountability can help direct investments and activities to protect public health and recover beneficial uses. We hope the interests can move beyond conflict and begin working together again to improve water quality. We welcome any opportunities to explore how EPA can better support these and related efforts. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at (415) 972-3434.

Sincerely,

 9/14/12

Valentina Cabrera Stagno,
Agricultural Water Quality Specialist