



California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Central Valley Region

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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REGIONAL WATER BOARD APPROVES
TOUGHER HILMAR SETTLEMENT

RANCHO CORDOVA-The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, at its regular public meeting, today approved a \$3 million dollar settlement for an Administrative Civil Liability complaint against Hilmar Cheese and Hilmar Whey Protein, Inc. of Merced County.

The settlement includes an independent environmental study, focused on water quality, the food industry and salt waste issues that will provide useful information in developing a comprehensive salt management strategy for the Central Valley. Hilmar will pay \$1,850,000 to fund the study, a civil liability of \$1 million to the State's Waste Discharge Permit Fund, and will reimburse \$150,000 to the California Attorney General's office for work on the case.

The Regional Water Quality Control Board has investigated discharges of cheese processing wastewater to fields near the plant in Hilmar (an unincorporated community). After the Regional Board Executive Officer issued a \$4 million dollar Administrative Civil Liability complaint in January 2005, prosecuting attorneys for the Regional Board and lawyers for Hilmar reached a proposed settlement in October 2005. The Board requested lawyers for both sides to strengthen the Settlement Agreement to address their concern, reaching a better solution before the Regional Board would make a final decision regarding the settlement.

Central Valley Water Board chair Robert Schneider commented, "This Board is working toward a long-term solution to the salinity problem in the Central Valley. We will continue to enforce regulations to protect water quality and the approved study will benefit the people of the State, water quality, and the food industry."