August 24, 2020

Ms. Sandy Kerl
General Manager
San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA)
4677 Overland Ave
San Diego, CA 92123

Sent via email

Dear General Manager Kerl:

On behalf of the below signed organizations and our many thousands of members working to advance environmental and social justice and equity throughout the San Diego region, we’re writing to express our opposition to the advancement of Phase B of the Regional Conveyance System (RCS) study and project.

It is telling to us that 18 of the Authority’s 24 member agencies felt it necessary to spend additional public funds to commission their own independent Member Agency Managers (MAM) study to verify the assumptions used by the SDCWA’s consultants in development of the Phase A RCS report, and to ensure ratepayers and the public interest were represented during these proceedings. We believe the findings of the MAM Independent Consultant study are more than enough to demonstrate this project is misguided, unaffordable, and inequitable.
If implemented, this $6-plus Billion project would dig, tunnel, and pump water over 100 miles through San Diego state parks, a national forest, several active earthquake fault lines, and some of our region’s most prized wild lands. As the MAM study shows, if implemented, this project would increase energy demands by 40% over our current conveyance, significantly increasing greenhouse gas emissions while bringing minimal long-term economic or community benefits to San Diego.

Even in the face of the MAM study that showed this project is not cost-effective and would further drive up our water rates, already among the most expensive in the State and country, the SDCWA staff is recommending the expenditure of an additional $1.3 million to further this project during a time of crisis – a time when all efforts should be made to ensure the affordability of essential services to San Diegans. Instead, the staff’s recommendation would waste an additional million-plus dollars of ratepayer money to further study an environmentally destructive pipe dream. This is the definition of throwing good money after bad. In a time when funds are scarce and San Diego families are facing a crisis unlike any other, we strongly urge this Board to reject moving forward with Phase B of the study and to reallocate these funds towards water rate assistance for low-income families in our community.

Our region is now positioned to address our water needs in a more environmentally and socially just way, by integrating management to achieve multiple benefits for our communities. For instance, a recent City of San Diego study showed that 20% of our water supplies could potentially come from urban stormwater capture, and yield a savings of over half a billion dollars.1 Approaches such as wastewater recycling, stormwater capture, and green infrastructure bring equitable solutions and benefits to our urban environment and communities including additional supplies, green space development and restoration, improved water and air quality, reduction of flooding, creation of green jobs and job training, and carbon sequestration, to name just a few.2 The RCS does exactly the opposite. It is, at its core, an 18th century attempt at a solution to our 21st century problems and needs, is an affront to ratepayer protections and good governance, and exemplifies the disconnect still present between the County Water Authority and the public and communities that depend on affordable, equitable water policies.

Our collective organizations urge you to vote no on furthering this project and allocate the money budgeted for further study towards rate-assistance for low income families struggling to pay their water bills during this time of crisis.

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1 “Storm Water Harvesting Augmentation Analysis”, by Tetra Tech. Task Order 38, June 2016, City of San Diego.
2 For more on the many water, climate, air, and community health benefits of incorporating and funding green infrastructure, see: https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/benefits-green-infrastructure.
We look forward to working with our local water agencies towards the development of a just, equitable approach to solving our water supply, water quality, and climate issues in our region.

Sincerely,

Matt O’Malley  
Executive Director & Managing Attorney  
San Diego Coastkeeper

Diane Takvorian  
Executive Director  
Environmental Health Coalition

Marco Gonzalez  
Executive Director  
Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation

Nicole Capretz  
Executive Director  
Climate Action Campaign

Dave Hogan  
San Diego Chapter Chair  
Sierra Club

Laura Walsh  
Policy Coordinator  
The Surfrider Foundation San Diego Chapter

Marie Chen  
Public Policy Co-Chair  
SanDiego350

Lydia Van Note  
Board President  
San Diego League of Conservation Voters

Dan Silver, MD  
Chief Executive Officer  
Endangered Habitats League

Pam Heatherington  
Board of Directors Board Member  
Environmental Center of San Diego

Laura Hunter  
Escondido Neighbors United

Jim Peugh  
Conservation Chair  
San Diego Audubon Society

Zachary Plopper  
Associate Director  
WILDCOAST

David Garmon, MD  
Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy

Chelsi Sparti  
Associate Director  
Samuel Lawrence Foundation

Tara Hammond  
Chief Environmental Officer  
Hammond Climate Solutions

Kyra Greene  
Executive Director  
Center on Policy Initiatives

Duncan McFetridge  
Executive Director  
Cleveland National Forest Foundation

Save Our Forests & Ranchlands
Sam Mazzeo  
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Dr. Cindy Lin  
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Hey Social Good

Emma Jayne Harrison, Ph.D.  
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Center for Interdisciplinary Environmental Justice

Connor Franklin Rey  
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Sunrise Movement San Diego

Michael Torti  
Co-Chair, Environmental Committee  
Business For Good

Leslie Reynolds  
Executive Director  
Groundwork San Diego – Chollas Creek