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April 25, 2024

The Honorable John Garamendi
United States House of Representatives
2004 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for the Abandoned and Derelict Vessel Removal Act of 2024

Dear Congressman Garamendi:

I write to you to express the Delta Stewardship Council's (Council) support for the Abandoned and Derelict Vessel Removal Act of 2024 (H.R. 7719). The Council supports the bill's intent, as it relates to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta), to establish guidelines, provide funding mechanisms, and clarify federal authorities for the removal of abandoned and derelict vessels. This is a pressing issue in the Delta and a necessary matter to address to achieve the state's coequal goals for the region.

In 2009, the California state legislature passed the Delta Reform Act that created the Council to advance California's coequal goals for the Delta – a more reliable statewide water supply and a resilient Delta ecosystem – in a manner that protects and enhances the unique characteristics of the Delta as an evolving place where people live, work, and recreate. The Council carries out its mission by implementing the Delta Plan, a long-term management plan to ensure coordinated federal, state, and local actions in the Delta to achieve these goals.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

The Delta is a vital region to California's landscape and economy, making the protection and preservation of this region of utmost importance to the state and the entire country. The Delta is formed by the confluence of the state's two largest rivers: the Sacramento and the San Joaquin. More than 627,000 people in dozens of communities call the Delta home, and it is also home to more than 750 animal and plant species and 55 fish species, many of them threatened or endangered. Water from the Delta supports California's \$50 billion agricultural industry, both within and outside the Delta, which includes more than 400 commodities. In addition, as you are well aware and thanks to your efforts, the Delta was also designated as the State of California's first National Heritage Area in 2019, a testament to the Delta's importance.

Lastly, the Delta is also a world-class recreational destination, attracting about 12 million visitors per year, who take advantage of its 290 shoreline recreational areas, 300 marinas, 57,000 navigable waterways, and more than 20 species of sport fish. As such, the problem of abandoned and derelict vessels is a serious environmental and safety concern in the Delta.

The Delta Plan, Economic Sustainability Plan, and Abandoned Vessels [Chapter Five of the Delta Plan](#) specifically addresses protecting and enhancing the Delta as an evolving place and outlines a recommendation related to the removal of abandoned and derelict vessels, which the provisions of the Abandoned and Derelict Vessel Removal Act could help address.

DP R11 (Provide New and Protect Existing Recreation Activities) encourages providing new, and protecting existing, recreation opportunities in the Delta, using the Delta Protection Commission's [Economic Sustainability Plan \(ESP\)](#). The ESP specifically addresses the importance of protecting the Delta's waterways for recreational, community, and economic use, as well as the dangers of leaving abandoned and derelict vessels unaddressed. As the ESP outlines, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was initially responsible for keeping the waterways clear but had to halt providing that service about 30 years ago. As a result, currently, the local county sheriff departments are responsible for removing these vessels. However, due to limited funding, these departments are limited in their capacity to address the problem. The state also has a program with limited funding to remove abandoned or derelict commercial vessels in the Delta through the State Lands Commission, and some funding is provided by the state Department of Parks and Recreation, Division of Boating and Waterways (Boating and Waterways) for the removal of recreational vehicles. The bill's authorization for the U.S. Army Corps to remove *any* abandoned vehicles, rather than just those impeding navigation, as

well as the additional funding and organization provided by the bill, would be a welcome development to the Delta's management of this issue. The bill's requirement for a national inventory of abandoned and derelict vessels, hosted by the U.S. Army Corps, could also help build a better understanding of the scale of the issue in the Delta, informing future management decisions.

Conclusion

We appreciate your dedication and attention to this pressing matter. The Council understands the importance of addressing abandoned and derelict vessels and supports more funding and attention to the issue. Ensuring the coordinated, funded, and full removal of abandoned and derelict vessels is paramount to ensuring a safe and healthy Delta for all. If you have any questions, or if we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Council's Legislative and Policy Advisor, Brandon Chapin, at brandon.chapin@deltacouncil.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Julie Lee

Chair

Delta Stewardship Council

CC: The Honorable Laphonza Butler, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Alex Padilla, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Mark DeSaulnier, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Josh Harder, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Doris Matsui, U.S. Representative
The Honorable Mike Thompson, U.S. Representative