

# RLO024 RD 830

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January 10, 2013

VIA: U.S. Mail and  
e-mail [recirculateddpeircomments@deltacouncil.ca.gov](mailto:recirculateddpeircomments@deltacouncil.ca.gov) subject line  
Recirculated Draft EIR

Ms. Cindy Messer, Delta Plan Program Manager  
Delta Stewardship Council  
980 Ninth Street, Suite 1500  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Comments on (1) Final Draft of the Delta Plan,<sup>1</sup> and  
(2) Recirculated Draft Programmatic EIR (Vol. 3)

Dear Ms. Messer:

Reclamation District 830 (RD 830) is pleased to submit the following comments on the two subject documents. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions.

### Background

RD 830 is responsible for maintaining the reclamation works which allow Jersey Island to exist in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Jersey Island one of the eight western Delta islands designated by the California Department of Water Resources as critical for the protection of water quality in the Central Delta.<sup>2</sup> Reclamation District 830 (RD 830), a California

<sup>1</sup> Eric Alvarez, Public Information Office, DSC, has advised ISD's legal counsel: "The DSC is not officially soliciting comments on the Final Draft of the Delta Plan – so there is no actual deadline date. However, should you wish to offer some thoughts, you are welcome to address them to: Cindy Messer, Delta Plan Program Manager. E-mail from E. Alvarez to Fred Etzel, December 13, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Actions and Priorities: Delta Protection Act, March 1990, Department of Water Resources, page 2.

## Response to comment RLO024-1

Comment noted.

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## **Response to comment RLO024-2**

This is a comment on the project, not on the EIR.

Reclamation District, is responsible for maintaining the reclamation works on Jersey Island. These works include approximately 16 miles of perimeter levees and a main drainage canal which collects water from the Island's drainage ditches. The canal begins at the Dutch Slough levee of Jersey Island and runs in a northwesterly direction parallel to and along the northeast side of Jersey Island Road until it intersects the San Joaquin River levee.

ISD has a fundamental interest in the Delta Plan based on its ownership of the surface of Jersey Island<sup>3</sup> and ISD's use of Jersey Island as an integral part of its wastewater treatment and water recycling operation. Under separate cover, ISD is submitting a letter commenting on the Delta Plan and the Recirculated Draft EIR.

The Notice of Availability for the Recirculated Draft EIR states: "The Council does not propose construction, operation, or maintenance of any facilities as part of the Delta Plan. Rather, the Council seeks to influence and encourage other agencies to take certain actions." The Delta Plan itself notes in its Introduction at page 22, "The Delta Plan lays out 14 regulatory policies and 71 recommendations."

RD 830's two comments, below, are similarly policy-oriented. The first comment addresses the policy of sovereign immunity as it affects the financing of the operation and maintenance of Delta levees, and the second concerns policies related to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise and their impacts in Delta levees.

### Comment One

At page 286, the Delta Plan States:

#### *Problem Statement*

**No mechanism exists for ensuring that costs of levee maintenance are borne by all beneficiaries.** Current financing of levee operations and maintenance is not well

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<sup>3</sup> Jersey Island is one of eight western Delta islands considered by the California Department of Water Resources to be critical to California's drinking water supply and quality. Source: Actions and Priorities: Delta Protection Act, March 1990, Department of Water Resources, page 2.

coordinated, and future funding sources are uncertain. Financing of local levee operations, maintenance, emergency preparedness and response, and related data collection and reporting efforts would benefit from greater coordination and integration. [Emphasis added.]

**Policies** No policies with regulatory effect are included in this section.

**Recommendations RR R2 Finance Local Flood Management Activities** The Legislature should create a Delta Flood Risk Management Assessment District with fee assessment authority (including over State infrastructure) to provide adequate flood control protection and emergency response for the regional benefit of all beneficiaries, including landowners, infrastructure owners, and other entities that benefit from the maintenance and improvement of Delta levees, such as water users who rely on the levees to protect water quality.

Part of the solution to the above stated problem is that the Delta Plan should contain and the Draft EIR should analyze the impacts of a regulatory policy with the force of law directing the Delta Stewardship Council to advocate for and seek federal legislation under which reclamation districts in the Delta are permitted to assess federal infrastructure projects for the collection of funds for their maintenance.

On Jersey Island, the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) operates transmission towers and lines which traverse it and other Delta islands. On Jersey Island, WAPA occupies easements which are 200 feet in width and are calculated to contain 86.81 acres. These transmission towers and line easements are protected by the Jersey Island Reclamation Works operated and maintained by RD 830. The RD 830 Board of Trustees has determined that the continuous maintenance and operation of the Reclamation Works does provide a benefit to the maintenance and operation of the WAPA high tower transmission lines within the District. This benefit accrues from the maintenance of the levees which in turn allow access over the land surface of the island for the continuous maintenance and operation of the high tower transmission lines.

RD 830's annual assessment for WAPA is \$49,853, or 14% of the total annual maintenance and operation costs of \$860,430. WAPA has refused to pay this assessment, claiming that as an agency of the federal government, it "is tax exempt and not assessable for the purpose of providing funds for the construction, maintenance, repair or operation of Reclamation District No.

**No comments**

- n/a -

RL0024-2

830 works.”<sup>4</sup> This exemption is based on the doctrine of sovereign immunity as embodied in case law, such as *United States v. County of Allegheny* (1944) 322 U. S. 174.

Refusal by WAPA to pay its fair share of the RD 830 O & M assessment, while likely legally correct, places an unreasonable burden on the other property owners who are subject to the assessment, including ISD ratepayers. This is because ISD is far and away the majority landowner on Jersey Island. Therefore, its ratepayers shoulder in majority part the financial burden shirked by WAPA. Congressional legislation is necessary to overrule relevant case law so that federal projects are no longer able to claim sovereign immunity from assessments imposed by local reclamation districts, such as RD 830, in order to fund the cost of maintaining the reclamation works for which they are responsible.

For these reasons, the Delta Plan should contain and the Draft should analyze the impacts of a regulatory policy with the force of law directing the Delta Stewardship Council to advocate for and seek congressional legislation under which reclamation districts in the Delta are permitted to assess federal infrastructure projects which directly benefit from the operation and maintenance of their reclamation works.

#### Comment Two

The Delta Plan at page 25 contains Table 1-1 Summary of Anticipated Changes Affecting the Delta by 2050 and 2100. This Table states that by 2050 sea level rise in the Delta is predicted to be 14 inches and by 2100 it is predicted to be 40 to 55 inches.

The Draft EIR at page 21-11 states:

#### **21.4.3.2.3 Impact 21-3b: Conflict with Operations of Proposed Facilities Due to Climate Change and Sea Level Rise**

##### *Effects of Project Operation*

Because of the long-term nature of climate change and sea level rise, impacts related to climate change and sea level rise are considered in this EIR only as they affect project operations.

<sup>4</sup> H. R. Miller, Realty Specialist, Department of Energy, Western Area Power Administration, letter of August 11, 2011 to RD 830.

### **Response to comment RLO024-3**

The ongoing risk of levee failure, including the risk due to climate change and sea level rise, is an aspect of the existing environment and of declining conditions in the Delta. As Section 12 of the EIR explains, climate change is a cumulative problem that occurs on a global scale. Describing the specific impacts of the Project’s contribution to greenhouse gas emissions is impossible.

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Climate change conditions are projected to increase sea level water elevations in San Francisco Bay and western Delta (BCDC 2011). [Emphasis added.]

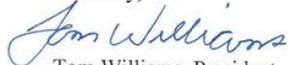
*Conclusion*

It is not known at this time how implementation of the Revised Project would result in construction and operations of Delta ecosystem restoration projects, including the location, number, capacity, operational criteria, and methods and duration of activities. **Project-level impacts would be addressed in future site specific environmental analysis conducted at the time such projects are proposed by lead agencies. However, because the Delta ecosystem restoration projects encouraged by the Revised Project could be affected by increased surface water elevations due to sea level rise which could be detrimental to aquatic resources that inhabit shallow water areas, the potential impacts on Delta restoration projects due to climate change and sea level rise are considered significant.** [Emphasis added.]

Long term climate change and sea level rise pose a significant risk of levee failure for the western Delta Islands, including Jersey Island. Unfortunately, the Draft EIR defers analysis of this risk to when future, site specific projects are proposed by lead agencies. While this is an expedient approach for the immediate purpose of the Draft EIR, it is nonetheless shortsighted and totally ignores the realities of climate change and sea level rise and their inevitably devastating impact on all Delta island levees. The Draft EIR should at least establish an analytical framework for analysis of these impacts as they will certainly become manifest.

This concludes RD 830's comments on the two subject documents. Thank you for your attention to this letter.

Sincerely,



Tom Williams, President  
Board of Trustees

Cc: ISD Board of Directors

## **Response to comment RLO024-4**

Comment noted.

RLO024-3

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