



March 9, 2026

The Honorable Monique Limón
President Pro Tempore
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814
Sent via email:

RE: Coalition Letter Opposing the Reappointment of Dorene D’Adamo to State Water Resources Control Board

Dear Senator Limón:

We write to respectfully request that the Senate reject the appointment of Dorene D’Adamo to the State Water Resources Control Board (Board). Vice-Chair D’Adamo has served on the Board since 2013. During her tenure the Board has abandoned much of its regulatory authority and environmental protection mandate, resulting in severe ecosystem degradation and harms to disadvantaged communities. The Board has also jettisoned many of its racial equity commitments, adding to community distrust and disillusionment. Vice-Chair D’Adamo has been a part of the Board’s devastating transformation. As detailed below, Vice-Chair D’Adamo’s actions make her unfit for continued service on the Board.

The Board’s responsibilities encompass water rights, water quality, drinking water, groundwater, and water and wastewater infrastructure funding. It is charged with upholding both state and federal law and it administers both quasi-judicial and quasi-legislative proceedings. These functions overlap most fully in the Board’s oversight of the Bay-Delta ecosystem. The Board is responsible for adopting and enforcing a Water Quality Control Plan (WQCP) that reasonably protects all beneficial uses of water, including agricultural, municipal, and ecosystem water uses. Federal regulation requires WQCPs to be reviewed and updated every three years.¹ The Bay-Delta WQCP was last substantively updated in 1995, with minor changes adopted in 2006. In 2009, with the passage of the Delta Reform Act, the Board began a substantive update, attempting to adopt regulatory standards that would halt the severe decline of native fish populations, and the crisis in the Bay-Delta’s ecosystem.

That effort has largely consisted of delay and deregulation. The Board divided the WQCP development into phases but delayed the first phase (San Joaquin River) due to an intense focus on drought management from roughly 2012-2016. The Board’s 2018 adoption of San Joaquin River flow requirements included language encouraging “voluntary” approaches to providing environmental water

¹ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-40/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-131>

needs. And the Board has not implemented the standards that were adopted in 2018. Since then, the Newsom administration has pursued so-called “Voluntary Agreements” (VAs) and the Board has, while ostensibly operating independently, provided thousands of staff hours as “technical assistance” to the agricultural and urban water interests behind the VAs.

The VAs would strike a devastating blow to an ecosystem that has been decimated while the Board has dragged its feet. As Tribes, Delta communities, fishing businesses, and environmental scientists have documented in hundreds of pages of written testimony and hours of oral presentations, the VAs are racist, exclusionary, and would protect status quo water use, or worse. At a recent Board workshop, nearly 200 individuals spoke in opposition to the VAs, urging the Board to use its regulatory authority to protect the “most valuable estuary and wetland ecosystem on the west coast of North and South America.”² During her tenure on the Board, Vice-Chair D’Adamo has been a staunch supporter of the VAs. When the Board voted to adopt the San Joaquin River WQCP in 2018, Vice-Chair D’Adamo was the lone no vote because she felt the Plan provided too much water for the San Joaquin River and the Bay-Delta’s ecosystem.³

Vice-Chair D’Adamo occupies the Board seat with a statutory responsibility to be “qualified in the field of water quality.”⁴ She also fulfills the statutory requirement for a Board Member to be “qualified in the field of water supply and water quality relating to irrigated agriculture.”⁵ The statute’s qualification requirements do not specify that a Board Member must prioritize the interests of irrigated agriculture over other interests. The Board is a regulatory agency, and its members must understand how to effectively regulate different water users, not be advocates on behalf of the regulated community. In addition, understanding the field of water quality, in the context of the Board’s statutory responsibilities, demands a commitment to protecting and enhancing water quality and a reasonable approach to regulation. Advocating for agricultural interests that continue to divert unsustainable quantities of water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin watershed and degrade its water quality is inconsistent with that commitment. Moreover, that degraded water quality has created adverse and expanding impacts to tribes, Delta communities, the commercial fishing industry, agricultural interests in the Delta, and others whose interests have been devalued and ignored in the Board’s water quality decision making.

In 2022, a coalition of tribes and environmental justice advocates filed a federal discrimination complaint against the Board under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. USEPA accepted the complaint and initiated an informal resolution process to hold the Board accountable for upholding the law. However, the Board dragged its feet past the end of the Biden administration, essentially guaranteeing that there will be no remedy for its past and ongoing discriminatory practices. This delay is particularly galling given the fact that the Board has adopted a racial equity resolution and action plan. Vice-Chair D’Adamo’s actions as a Board member since 2013 and her opposition to resolution of the Title VI complaint make her unfit for continued service.

² Water Code Section 85002.

³ See: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/resolutions/2018/rs2018_0059.pdf, accessed February 16, 2026.

⁴ Water Code Section 175(a)

⁵ Ibid.

These inactions and deregulatory efforts reflect poorly on the entire Board and represent a failure to fulfill its statutory responsibilities and manifest inconsistency with its own racial equity commitments. It is imperative to look at reforming the Board to ensure its members can adequately carry out its critical functions on behalf of Californians and our natural environment, and to ensure that its members demonstrate a willingness and commitment to doing so. We look forward to working with you on reform proposals beginning in the 2027 legislative session.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above, we urge you to deny Vice-Chair D'Adamo another four years on the Board. We also urge you to ensure the Legislative Analyst's Office publishes a full, transparent, and timely report on how the Board guided the VA process despite numerous public proclamations that the Board was not responsible for their development. Californians depend on independent regulatory agencies led by people with integrity and a commitment to equity and justice. The Board has lost its way, and it is time for the legislature to intervene.

Sincerely,

Malissa Tayaba
Vice-Chair
Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians

Gary Mulcahy
Government Liaison
Winnemem Wintu Tribe

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla
Executive Director
Restore the Delta

Gloria Alonso
Environmental Justice Advocacy Coordinator
Little Manila Rising

Eric Buescher
Managing Attorney
San Francisco Baykeeper