



SONOMA COUNTY FARM BUREAU

Affiliated with the California Farm Bureau Federation and the American Farm Bureau Federation

June 15, 2015

State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street,
Sacramento, CA 95814
commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov



Re: 6/17/15 Board Meeting, Agenda Item 12, DIVISION OF WATER RIGHTS

Dear Chair Marcus and Board Members:

REQUEST TO HOLD INFORMATIONAL ORDER

Sonoma County Farm Bureau (SCFB) appreciates the opportunity to work with SWRCB, CDFW, and NMFS on the Russian River tributaries Coho salmon habitat protection. We are keenly aware of the effects of the present drought on the survival of agriculture and fish. We have cut down water diversion to a minimum. We are fully supportive of the Voluntary Drought Initiative (VDI). Our members have offered to release their stored irrigation water in order to maintain the minimum flow in the critical reaches of the tributaries.

We believe that the chance of fish survival during this extreme drought can be maximized only if landowners voluntarily cooperate with the agencies focused on the mission of saving the endangered fish. Regulations put a wedge between the regulator and the regulated; divert attention away from the mission; and at times become a hindrance to practical solutions such as the aforementioned release of privately held irrigation water. This is why we were alarmed when we heard of the proposed emergency action as we just started our collaborative VDI efforts.

Despite our intensive dialogue and collaboration with the agencies, there remains one unresolved problem: the provision that the Deputy Director may issue watershed-wide informational orders. (See Draft Regulation, §876, subdivision (e), and subdivision (f) in the Change Sheet #1 of 06/12/2015.) However, when we analyze the practical merits and demerits of issuing the informational order at this time, it becomes clear that the action should be put on hold.

Although any information could be useful, much of the surface water diversion information you seek through the order is already available, or should be available if you diligently enforced the existing regulations. The required groundwater information would be difficult and expensive for the private well owners to generate on a 30-day notice, but will be available in a few years when the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014 begins to bear fruit. We don't know why some data are needed because nowhere was it explained how the groundwater information would be used in formulating new regulations. Most importantly, all the information collected will not save any fish this summer.

In contrast to the vague merits, the demerits of the order are clear: it will irreparably damage the fragile cooperative spirit we are trying to nurture, putting us back into the atmosphere of mutual suspicion and distrust. Its effects will be felt far beyond this particular emergency regulation.

Therefore, **we request §876, subdivisions (e) and (f) (per Change Sheet #1) be deleted from the proposed Emergency Regulation, and consonant changes be made in subdivision (b) and in your Resolution.**

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tito." with a period.

Tito Sasaki, Chair
SCFB Water Committee