

**House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water and Power**

March 31, 2009

Testimony of Rep. Ken Calvert

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As a former Member of the Natural Resources Committee I'm happy to be back among friends to talk about one of the most critical issues facing my state and the West.

I wish I was returning to this Committee to discuss a more positive situation, but unfortunately I am here because California is in the middle of a water crisis. And, as luck would have it, our water crisis comes during the worst economic downturns in decades. The drought, in many respects, is similar to the sagging economy because there is no certainty as to when it will end.

Every community, especially those in arid climates, knows that periods of drought will come and go. Californians are particularly well aware that droughts are part of our state's history and water planners up and down the state have taken a number of steps over the years to prepare for times like these. In fact, I would argue that few states have gone further than California in terms of water conservation, reuse and storage. To its credit, the House Resources Committee, under the leadership of both parties, has a strong record of authorizing federal projects and supporting participation in a number of these efforts.

In past drought periods, California has "scraped by" utilizing a variety of conservation and water transfer options. However, our current drought is not like other droughts. In addition to suffering from a natural dry spell, California is also suffering from a federally-imposed dry spell.

In December 2007, a federal judge ordered restrictions on water project operations in the Bay-Delta to help protect a threatened fish species, the delta smelt. Combined with the dry conditions, the impact of the federally-imposed pumping restrictions is extraordinary. In total, the federally imposed water restrictions have resulted in the loss of nearly a third of the water supply that 25 million Californians depend on from the Delta operations.

Recent estimates show that in just the past couple of months, more than 250,000 acre-feet of water have been lost to the Pacific Ocean. Absent the federal restrictions, the quarter million acre-feet of water could have been exported to water users throughout the state. This is enough water to meet the water needs of half-a-million people for a year. Put another way, the water we have lost to the ocean has a value of more than \$27 million using Metropolitan Water District's Tier 1 Supply Rate as a conservative cost basis.

Of course, there are a number of ways to calculate the economic toll of California's drought. The loss of jobs and the loss of economic opportunities are considerable and widespread. Farm land throughout California's central valley is going fallow while farm workers struggle to find work. Closer to my district in southern California, the lack of a proven water supply has and will continue to diminish economic growth. Therefore, a reliable water supply is critically linked to California's economic recovery and that of the overall U.S. economy. Therefore, the federal

government must take on an active role in finding solutions to our state's water supply challenges.

Specifically, I urge the Bureau of Reclamation and other federal agencies to direct stimulus funding to short-term projects in California that will increase water supplies and help restore the fisheries in the Bay-Delta region. I also want to strongly encourage the federal regulatory agencies to follow the lead of the California state agencies have been prioritizing and streamlining the approval of critical water supply and environmental restoration projects. Now, perhaps more than ever, a consensus is forming around the need to manage the Delta with the co-equal objectives of ensuring water supply reliability and environmental sustainability.

That growing consensus includes making new conveyance facilities part of a long-term solution for the Delta as well as steps to improve the Delta ecosystem. As California works to implement long-term solutions, the federal government must take a more active and interested role in facilitating key projects.

Today, there is no evidence that the federally-imposed pumping restrictions have benefitted the delta smelt population. Yet, the negative economic impacts are undeniable. Mr. Chairman, if this Committee is going to continue to give federal agencies the authority to take actions that kill jobs and harm our economy for the benefit of species, then the American people deserve clear and undeniable evidence that those actions are in fact benefiting the species.

Since I was first elected to Congress I have spent a considerable amount of my time and energy trying to address the water challenges in California. In my quest for long-term solutions, I have always been willing to reach across the aisle.

I look forward to continuing my work with the Committee and the other stakeholders as we work to address California's water challenges.