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TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL CARLIN

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Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Subcommittee, good afternoon.

My name is Michael Carlin, and I am Assistant General Manager for Water at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. Thank you for inviting me here to speak about a federal program which I believe deserves your continued support and reauthorization, the National Estuary Program founded under Section 320 of the Clean Water Act.

In my remarks, I will provide you with a short overview of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (Commission), and then describe the long-standing partnership and programs between the Commission and our local San Francisco Estuary Project. I will end with the reasons why I believe the National Estuary Programs successfully serve their local and regional communities and offer some suggestions for ways to strengthen the program.

The Commission is a Department of the City and County of San Francisco that provides water, wastewater, and municipal power services to San Francisco. Under contractual agreement with 28 wholesale water agencies, the SFPUC also supplies water to 1.6 million additional customers within three Bay Area counties. The Commission provides four distinct services: Regional Water, Local Water, Wastewater collection, treatment and disposal, and Power generation.

How we have worked together

The Commission has been an enthusiastic partner with the San Francisco Estuary Project since its formation over 20 years ago. We participated in the Management Committee that developed the original Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for protecting and restoring the estuary, and assisted with updating that plan last year. Together, we have worked on water resource and environmental issues in a number of Estuary Project forums and workgroups. These efforts have helped bring a more

cooperative and regional perspective to resource protection and management issues throughout the Bay Area.

The Commission has supported and been a part of many of Estuary Project's public information efforts, such as the highly regarded biennial State of the Estuary Conference and the bi-monthly Estuary newsletter. The State of the Estuary Conference brings together hundreds of leading decision-makers, scientists, and public interest groups and stakeholders to provide an assessment of the ecological health of the West coast's largest estuary, while the newsletter provides timely, valuable information about water supply, wetland, and wildlife-related concerns in San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

An early action identified by the Estuary Project was recognizing the need for better regional monitoring. The Project's regional focus on this issue ultimately resulted in a multi-agency cooperative water quality Regional Monitoring Program for the San Francisco Estuary. This important effort is now implemented by the San Francisco Estuary Institute, the Bay area science partner of the Estuary project, as envisioned in the Project's management plan. The Commission consistently uses data generated by the Regional Monitoring Program's extensive monitoring network and special studies to guide decisions about where to allocate resources on pollutants of concern and how best to focus on regulatory permit requirements.

Many other significant regional programs and projects have been implemented over the past 20 years that address needs identified by the Estuary Project. For example, the Commission uses the Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report, developed by an interagency team under the auspices of the Estuary Project, as a guide for planning wetlands restoration projects in and around the estuary's baylands. The report has helped to guide decisions on projects as large as the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, which encompasses over 15,000 acres of wetlands, and as small as a local recovery project on Commission property that covers just 41 acres.

The Estuary Project is also noted for its efficient and effective contracting and management skills and averages a 14 to 1 ratio of state and local match funds to Federal dollars expended. Recognizing the Project's competence in this area, the Commission supports a staffing partnership with the Project in which Estuary Project staff assist the Regional Water Quality Control Board with reviews of Commission projects thereby ensuring our proposals are even more responsive to the requirements and needs of the environment.

Why the estuary programs work

Over 20 years of experience proves that the estuary programs work. By providing critical regional perspective and local outreach, they help to promote effective management of our most significant estuaries. The San Francisco Estuary Project certainly has helped to change the way scientists and resource managers think about managing and restoring San Francisco Bay and the region. The Project's communication tools and strategies have helped integrate many disciplines, including hydrology, geology, biology, and chemistry. As a result, there is a more interdisciplinary, stakeholder-based, approach applied to management in the region, and watershed groups are now working on almost every tributary river and stream advocating for healthier watersheds. This level of communication and cross-pollination is invaluable to an entity like the Commission because it maximizes transparency both for us as we manage the resources under our stewardship, and for stakeholders with an interest in, or jurisdiction over, those resources.

Recommendations for strengthening the NEPs

NEPs are effective, community-based networks. They can serve as nursery sites for many other necessary cooperative efforts, such as the imperative work needed now to address climate change. As the place where the sea meets the land, the estuaries are ground zero for the effects of climate change on important fish and mammal species and critical water supplies, wastewater treatment, and stormwater collection. For the Commission and our colleague water and wastewater utilities, these concerns have

mobilized us to action, including the formation of a coalition of water utilities from around the nation, the Water Utility Climate Alliance.

The Alliance includes eight of the nation's largest water providers, which serve drinking water to over 36 million Americans. Our members including the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, which chairs the WUCA,, Denver Water, Portland Water Bureau, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, San Diego County Water Authority, Seattle Public Utilities, and Southern Nevada Water Authority.

The Alliance is dedicated to providing leadership and collaboration on climate change issues affecting drinking water utilities by improving research, developing adaptation strategies and creating mitigation approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Using the venue of the Project's biennial State of the Estuary conference last year, I outlined for my fellow resource managers that a critical focus of the Alliance is to improve federally funded research efforts aimed at understanding the effects of climate change on our water systems. This is an objective we share with the Estuary Projects. Many anticipated climate change-related impacts remain poorly understood, including expected temperature increases, sea level rise, snowmelt runoff changes, streamflow alteration, and total precipitation. Each of these factors will likely have a tremendous effect on our operations – and on the ecosystems of the nation's estuarine environments. To the degree our water systems will be negatively impacted by climate change, so too will the nation's estuaries. We should partner in developing our predictive abilities related to these effects, and urge our partners in the federal and academic communities to enhance these efforts.

Water managers, regulatory agencies, the scientific community, stakeholder groups and others must learn to adapt to the new challenges we face as a result of climate change. The San Francisco Estuary Project, and I expect other Projects in the NEP nationwide, can and should have a central role in responding to this new challenge because these

programs have demonstrated the ability to bring numerous interested parties together to address complex resource issues – and because we need the same kind of interdisciplinary, transparent approach the NEP brings to the table.

Concluding remarks

I believe the National Estuary Programs successfully serve their local and regional communities, as demonstrated by the examples I have given about our local San Francisco Estuary Project. The Estuary Project has provided the Commission an invaluable forum with which to work in partnership with federal and state agencies, other local governments, environmental groups, business and industry, academia, and the public to preserve, restore, and enhance the San Francisco Estuary. As a result of its involvement with the Estuary Project's programs the Commission is able to make many important science-based decisions to help us manage our watersheds and natural resources in a way that assists with achieving an ecologically diverse and productive estuarine system.

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