

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION URGES CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR TO MAINTAIN WATER QUALITY REGULATIONS DURING COVID-19 CRISIS**

**April 2, 2020 (Sacramento, CA)** – Following last week’s sweeping announcement by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that it will suspend enforcement of environmental protection laws due to the current COVID-19 crisis, California environmental groups urge Governor Newsom not to follow the federal government’s lead.

The Chair of the California Senate Committee on Transportation has already asked the California Air Resources Board to delay existing regulatory requirements and suspend the development of future regulations related to air quality. Environmental groups are wary that the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards) will be similarly asked to relax regulatory requirements during the COVID-19 crisis.

The State Water Board has affirmed its commitment to “timely compliance by the regulated community [for] all Water Board orders and other requirements,” as written in a COVID-19 update released by the agency on March 20, 2020. Environmental groups urge the State Water Board maintain its commitment to public health by rejecting requests for industry exemptions.

While the severity of this crisis can’t be understated, environmental groups express concern that suspending water quality requirements, including much-needed monitoring to detect polluting violations, will only create an entirely new crisis. Suspending regulatory requirements will disrupt California’s commitment and significant work it has undertaken to secure safe, affordable water for every Californian, restore its groundwater aquifers, and ensure that its rivers, bays, and estuaries are safe to drink, fish, and swim.

“These requests are especially inappropriate during a pandemic that threatens both the health of all Californians and the stability of California’s economy, and the spread of which can be limited by the routine use of clean water,” writes the coalition. “Californians distressed by the increasing number of

public health and economic concerns that COVID-19 presents should not have additional concerns about the quality of their water.”

“Maintaining water quality is essential during this crisis,” said Sean Bothwell, Executive Director of California Coastkeeper Alliance. “As national clean water laws and their enforcement are eroded, California needs to bolster – not weaken – the function of our Water Boards to ensure every Californian has access to safe, clean water.”

“We have seen time and again the impact of lax oversight on drinking water safety,” said Jennifer Clary, Water Program Manager for Clean Water Action. “The State Water Board has put significant effort into strengthening the state’s drinking water program. We can’t allow ourselves as a state to backtrack on those improvements.”

“California has been a leader on drinking water – as seen through passage of the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund in 2019 and the Human Right to Water Law in 2012,” said Jonathan Nelson, Policy Director for Community Water Center. “Rather than take any steps back, now is the time to both protect that progress and also take strong new immediate actions to protect access to water for all Californians during the COVID-19 crisis.”

“The health of our rivers, wetlands and estuaries is more important than ever,” said Rachel Zwillinger, Water Policy Advisor for Defenders of Wildlife. “As we battle this health crisis, we urge Governor Newsom to maintain environmental protections for our wetlands and waterways and ensure all Californians have clean water now and always.”

“It is of the utmost importance that water quality standards are protected for the Delta to curtail the proliferation of Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs),” said Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, Executive Director of Restore the Delta. “These toxic blooms that grow during the warm months threaten the health and lives of people, pets, wildlife –and our drinking water systems. The Delta needs good water quality to protect California’s water exports and the 4 million people who live here.”

“Enforcing state environmental laws for clean water is just as vital for public health during this crisis,” said David Lewis, Executive Director of Save the Bay. “No suspension or rollbacks are justified.”

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**ABOUT CALIFORNIA COASTKEEPER ALLIANCE** - California Coastkeeper Alliance is a statewide voice for our waters. With the federal administration working against our environmental laws, CCKA defends and expands California’s protective legislation and strengthens the function of our state water board. We represent local Waterkeepers, empower communities towards a #TrashFree2030, and advocate with companies through the Blue Business Council. Together, we fight for swimmable, fishable, and drinkable waters for Californians today – and for future generations. California Coastkeeper Alliance is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. For more information, visit [cacoastkeeper.org](http://cacoastkeeper.org) and follow us on Twitter [@CA\\_Waterkeepers](https://twitter.com/CA_Waterkeepers).

**ABOUT CLEAN WATER ACTION** - Clean Water Action is a national nonprofit founded in 1972 to promote citizen engagement and action to protect our environment, health, economic well-being and community quality of life. Clean Water Action organizes strong grassroots groups, coalitions and campaigns to solve environmental and community problems. For more information, visit our website at [www.cleanwater.org](http://www.cleanwater.org) or follow us on Twitter [@cleanh2oca](https://twitter.com/cleanh2oca).

**ABOUT COMMUNITY WATER CENTER** - Community Water Center (CWC) believes all communities should have access to safe, clean, and affordable water. Founded in 2006, CWC works toward realizing the Human Right to Water for all Californians through education, organizing, and advocacy. For more information, visit [www.communitywatercenter.org/](http://www.communitywatercenter.org/) or follow us on Twitter [@CWaterC](https://twitter.com/CWaterC).

**ABOUT DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE** - Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With over 1.8 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. For more information, visit [defenders.org/newsroom](http://defenders.org/newsroom) and follow us on Twitter [@Defenders](https://twitter.com/Defenders).

**ABOUT PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK** - At Pesticide Action Network (PAN) North America, we work to create a just, thriving food system. PAN works with those on the frontlines to tackle the pesticide problem — and reclaim the future of food and farming. For more information, visit <http://www.panna.org/>.

**ABOUT RESTORE THE DELTA** - Restore the Delta works to protect the health of the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary and its communities. For more information, visit <https://www.restorethedelta.org/> and follow us on Twitter [@RestoretheDelta](https://twitter.com/RestoretheDelta).

**ABOUT SAVE THE BAY** - Save the Bay protects and restores San Francisco Bay for people and wildlife, uniting the Bay Area to create a clean and healthy Bay. As climate change and pollution threaten the Bay, we lead initiatives to make our region sustainable for future generations. For more information, visit <https://savesfbay.org/>.