Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 22, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Mr. President and Governor Brown:

As California faces a persistent, catastrophic drought, we write today to request that you direct Federal and state agencies and departments to take all necessary steps to prepare to capture, store, and move water to northern, central, and southern California in the event El Nino-related precipitation materializes this winter.

California is experiencing one of the driest years on record since 1895. This has resulted in communities we represent depleting their existing water supplies or simply running out of water altogether, as we have seen in some Central Valley regions. The extent of the drought has also resulted in unprecedented water rationing orders designed to stretch our already limited supplies into the future and first-of-their-kind groundwater regulations in our state.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicts the current El Nino in the Pacific Ocean has a 95% chance of continuing through the 2015-2016 winter. NOAA goes on to state that current atmospheric conditions indicate this could be a strong El Nino, bringing heavy and much-need precipitation to our drought-parched state, in northern, central, and southern California.

NOAA Climate Prediction Center (CPC) data shows there is a 66% chance that El Nino could bring normal to above normal precipitation this winter in northern California, where rain and snow feed critical reservoirs that supply water to the rest of our state. CPC data also shows upwards of a 93% chance of normal to above average precipitation for the rest of the state. This precipitation would likely peak in the first quarter of 2016. While El Nino-related precipitation will probably not end the drought we face, this much-needed water would be a crucial lifeline to our struggling constituents.

We believe that Federal and state environmental policies and regulations have negatively impacted California's current situation by denying us the ability to capture water for human use and consumption now and to better prepare ourselves for situations like the current drought. The House of Representatives has passed legislation to help provide more water to all Californians while maintaining protections for the environment. We remain committed to working with you and the U.S. Senate in a constructive manner to enact legislation to help our state.

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However, as the legislative process continues, we are interested in making sure that Federal and state agencies and departments are prepared to maximize the potential benefits of El Nino for California's families, farms, businesses, and cities. To that end, we have the following questions:

- Do Federal government agencies, such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Marine Fisheries Service, have plans in place to capture El Nino-related precipitation for human use? If so, what are these plans?
- Do California government agencies, such as the Department of Water Resources, the California Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State Water Resources Control Board, have plans in place to capture El Nino-related precipitation for human use? If so, what are these plans?
- If neither Federal nor state agencies have such plans in place, what is the timeline to develop and implement such plans?
- In years past, we have seen various policy and regulatory impediments – including those associated with protecting fish – that limited water exports from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. How do Federal and state agencies intend to overcome these obstacles to maximize water exports to central and southern California?
- What actions are Federal and state agencies taking or have already taken in advance of El Nino to capture and allocate water for human use in agriculture and urban centers?

While it is important to prepare for and respond to mudslides and flooding, it also important to remember that our constituents desperately need the water they are entitled to or have contracted and paid for. If El Nino-related precipitation materializes and we are able to capture it for human use, this could provide some much needed water to our constituents. No one can know for certain how much rain or snow could occur this winter, but it is imperative that we are prepared to maximize the benefit to all Californians that El Nino could bring.

We look forward to your response and working together to help our state through this difficult period.

Sincerely,

KEVIN McCARTHY
House Majority Leader

KEN CALVERT
Member of Congress