January 21, 2019

Mr. Francisco Guzman  
California Water Plan Update 2018  
Strategic Water Planning Branch  
Statewide Integrated Water Management  
California Department of Water Resources  
P.O. Box 942836  
Sacramento, CA 94236-0001

Re: Comments on the December 2018 Public Review Draft of the California Water Plan Update

Dear Mr. Guzman:

Irvine Ranch Water District (IRWD) appreciates the opportunity to once again provide input into the California Water Plan Update (Update 2018) and to provide specific comments on the December 2018 Public Review Draft of the California Water Plan Update.

As the Department of Water Resources (DWR or Department) is aware, IRWD has been a longstanding leader in water resource management and planning with an eye toward sustainability. The District supports the State's vision for a future of sustainable water resources management in California and for all communities. Based on our extensive experience in water resource planning and management, the District has reviewed the Public Review Draft. We offer the follows comments for the Department’s consideration, which focus on the completeness, accuracy and primary messages of the Public Review Draft.

Overarching Comments:

IRWD supports the State's long-term vision that management of California's water resources reach a high level of sustainable management, and that this vision should be the principle which guides the development of the Update 2018. As California moves forward with a more proactive approach to water resources and management, it is important for the State and DWR to acknowledge that many areas of the state are already successfully engaging in local and regionally sustainable water resources management and planning.
Local agency efforts to achieve sustainability through efforts in both supply and demand management are not specifically recognized or documented as lessons learned for future sustainability efforts within Update 2018. For example, many local agencies have successfully navigated flood and drought management as well as water supply reliability via water exchanges, groundwater recharge, and recycled water projects. These efforts should be documented and cited for other water systems to benefit from.

**Update 2018 should emphasize the importance of local and regional roles, and the relationship between the state and local agencies in achieving statewide water management success. It should more fully recognize this fact, build upon these efforts, and identify how these local and regional efforts support the specific values and recommended State actions contained in the Plan.**

Toward that end, we support the sentiments and comments expressed by the Association of California Water Association on Update 2018 — specifically those related to clarifying funding needs, recognizing local agency successes, and correcting factual errors.

**Comments on Chapter 3 - “Actions for Sustainability”:**

Chapter 3 discusses the “Actions for Sustainability” and outlines a number of goals and recommended actions which are aimed at moving the State towards greater water sustainability.

The first paragraph of Chapter 3 states that “State government must address challenges related to aging infrastructure, ecosystem decline, decision-making, and public funding.” In reality, Update 2018 should address the State’s need to address the State’s challenges related to State infrastructure and its role in supporting local agencies. Update 2018 should more fully recognize the important role of local agencies in addressing the vast majority of water infrastructure challenges.

Update 2018 is an effective tool for presenting statewide challenges and alternative policies, and provides a succinct list of goals aimed at achieving sustainability. From the list of six goals, one is notably missing. There is no mention of reducing burdens for local agencies. **Given the importance of local agencies in managing water resources statewide, Update 2018 should have a goal of reducing regulatory and reporting burdens on local agencies.** Particularly the following changes should be considered:

**Page 3 (Chapter 3) – Recommended Action 6.1:** With regard to the recommended action that “State agencies should also maintain data management best practices and work with local agencies to improve data gathering, accessibility, quality, and related decision-support tools,” duplicative reporting requirements are a large burden on local agencies which are complying with state agency data requests. Duplicative and overlapping reports will also make implementation of The Open and Transparent Water Data Act a
challenge, and the reporting is a burden on public funds and local data producers. The recommended action should reflect this.

**New Recommended Action:** Once the goal suggested above is added, a new recommended action under it which states the intent of the State to reduce duplicative reporting burdens on local agencies, which are faced with increased water management and flood management tasks and are often under-staffed, should be added.

Finally, IRWD noted that the goals and recommended actions are not prioritized in Update 2018 based on which actions should be undertaken first and the justifications for each goal are limited. **Update 2018 should be updated to reflect prioritization of the goals and recommended actions given the fact that, considering the limitations of funding and other resources, not all goals can be achieved simultaneously.** Stronger fact-based justifications for each goal and action should be also be added.

**Comments on Chapter 4- “Investing in Water Resource Sustainability”:**

Chapter 4 discusses the need to continue investing in water resource sustainability and discusses the funding needs for implementing the “Actions for Sustainability” discussed in Chapter 3. Update 2018’s funding and needs discussions combine flood and traditional water investment needs into one bucket, clumping two broadly defined water management sectors with significant funding needs together. This skews the reality on how much each sector is underfunded, in particular the funding gap for flood management throughout the state.

While Update 2018 mentions that flood management faces additional funding pressures, it still has its funding combined with ecosystem and general water funding needs at various points in Update 2018. Combining flood and traditional water funding skews the perception of the amount of funding available for flood management, which is underfunded and requires significant investment. As drought and flooding conditions increase in magnitude and amplitude, the need for flood and traditional water funding needs to be recognized separately, as both are increasingly important. In addition, the funding sections do not clearly support the needs of local agencies’ abilities to continue investments in water infrastructure.

IRWD recommended that the funding needs of flood management and traditional water management be discussed separately to ensure that flood management goals are properly funded and that the delivery and service of water, including water infrastructure investment, under non-flood conditions are maintained.

**The District also recommends that the ability for local agencies to continue raising funds to invest in water infrastructure be more strongly supported in Update 2018.** State requirements and new mandates, including increased reporting burdens, put pressure on local water rates and local property taxes which the state relies on for 85% of water funding in the state. This pressure
threatens water funding. As new requirements are passed for water shutoffs, water transfers, permitting and other water-related actions, these requirements place extra costs on local agencies and compete for limited dollars. When new administrative or reporting requirements are asked of local agencies, these added costs cannot always be absorbed by increased water rates, and the state relies on income from water rates to cover over three quarters of statewide water funding.

Additionally, Update 2018 should not assume state funding will not grow or should not grow. Under instances when there is surplus in the budget, it may be appropriate to request additional funding or bond funding for actions in the California Water Plan. IRWD recommends that Update 2018 clearly recommend the use of General Fund or bond expenditures to ensure the State’s responsibilities for existing water and flood infrastructure are covered. Update 2018 should support the use of bond funding or surplus general funds being allotted to the implementation of the Water Plan.

Comments on Factual Accuracy:

When reviewing the public draft, IRWD noted a number of confusing or inaccurate statements. IRWD asks DWR to address the following factual inaccuracies or confusing statements contained in Update 2018:

Safe Drinking Water: Providing safe drinking water to all Californians is not only a priority, but a legal requirement. Roughly 300 from more than 3,000 water systems, the majority of which are small water systems, provide unsafe drinking water. The statement on Page 2-2 which reads “During the most recent drought, many vulnerable communities were unable to provide reliable and safe water to their residents” should be amended to reflect the fact that of the 3,000 plus water systems in California, less than 300 struggle to provide safe drinking water. While it is crucial to address the challenges of these systems and unsafe drinking water, it is not helpful in solving that problem to mischaracterize the true extent of the problem.

Chapter 2: Additionally, the following statements in Chapter 2 are confusing and should be clarified as follows (underlines are suggested additions and strikeouts are suggested deletions):

Introduction- Page 2-1: “Many challenges that in some regions and communities face are particularly vexing and if not addressed can increasingly undermine the well-being of Californians in those communities. Although local, regional, and State water managers tackle the following challenges daily, they water managers within these communities facing challenges experience varying degrees of success.”
Reasoning: IRWD asks that the statement be reworded to clarify its meaning. In particular, the words *vexing* and *varying degrees of success* are not clear in their usage.

More-Extreme Hydrologic Events- Page 2-1: “Seasonal, year-to-year, and geographical variability among water sources and locations of water uses, particularly affecting disadvantaged communities, is also a complicating factor if not addressed through planning, implementation of climate adaptation measures and investments in water reliability.”

Reasoning: IRWD asks that the statement be reworded to clarify its meaning. The phrase “complicating factor” should be clarified.

Unstable Regional Economies- Page 2-4: Update 2018 states that “As water supplies have become less reliable, local and regional economies are more volatile, especially in agricultural and rural communities.” This statement is confusing and does not reflect that great reliability can be achieved even with climate change. IRWD asks that the statement be reworded to clarify its meaning. The term *volatile* is unclear in meaning and a better description would be that “local and regional economies have had to adapt and diversify their water supplies”.

Sustainability Outlook Indicators:

Table 1 Preliminary Indicators for Reporting on Intended Outcomes- Appendix Page 3: The Water Shortage Contingency Plan is mentioned in the Sustainability Outlook as an indicator of success. IRWD recommends that this indicator be removed. Legally mandated actions should not be set as goals or indicators of success for the California Water Plan, as they already have enforceability and thus are not a strong success metric of efforts towards sustainability.

HE3 - Distribution System Leak and Losses- Appendix Page 4-89: The Sustainability Outlook includes a targeted outcome for water loss. The targeted outcome is listed as zero distribution system leaks and losses. Even in the best case scenario, zero distribution system water loss or leaks is not realistic or practical. It is an unachievable indicator.

IRWD urges DWR to look to the statutory requirements for setting the water loss targets. Setting a standard at zero is inconsistent with the methodology to be set by the State Water Resources Control Board under Senate Bill 555 (2015). IRWD recommends that this standard be set on a volumetric basis, normalized for
individual agencies. Update 2018 should be aligned with this language and the standard being established by the State Water Resources Control Board.

Thank you for considering our comments as you prepare the final draft of the California Water Plan Update 2018. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (949) 453-5590 or Fiona Sanchez, IRWD’s Director of Water Resources, at (949) 453-5325, if we can be of any assistance to you.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Paul A. Cook, P.E.
General Manager