



## ● Chair of the Board Adán Ortega Jr.'s Monthly Activity Report – October 2023

### Summary

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This report highlights my activities as Chair of the Board during the month of October 2023 on matters relating to The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's business.

### Monthly Activities

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#### Key Activities

- Attended Sustainable Conservation's Reception & Meeting, where I served as a panelist along with Ashley Boren, Chief Executive Officer, and Karla Neimith, Director of the California Department of Water Resources, to provide guests with a deeper understanding of water in Southern California, particularly the significance of groundwater for climate adaptation, the potential to mitigate flood risk and recharge groundwater during wet years, and the importance of integrated water management. I am a director on the Board of the organization which met the next day at Metropolitan Headquarters. Sustainable Conservation advances the collaborative stewardship of California's land, air, and water to benefit nature and people. It is seen as an innovative and essential partner for the state, water agencies, growers, and others in shaping California's water future.



- Participated in the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Orange County Water Summit, on a panel interview on "What's Our Water Supply Future". I stressed the need for climate adaptation planning for finding such solutions in the Bay-Delta and the Colorado River, as well as local supply planning. I also facilitated the appearance of former State Secretary of State Bill Jones who I previously served under as a Chief Deputy. Secretary Jones spoke about lost opportunities in achieving resiliency with the derailment of the CalFed process that aimed to stabilize the Bay-Delta but was largely opposed by Delta interests 25 years ago. I was joined by Directors Larry Dick, Brenda Dennstedt, Jacque McMillan, Dennis Erdman, Karl Seckel, and General Manager Adel Hagekhalil.





- Participated in a Community Leaders Water Briefing with Western Municipal Water District to hear from State Senator Richard Roth and Assemblymember Sabrina Cervantes. I started my opening remarks by thanking State Senator Roth and Assemblymember Cervantes for supporting reliable water equitably available to all because California law promotes a human right to water. State Senator Richard Roth, Western Water Director Laura Roughton, Metropolitan and Western Director Brenda Dennstedt, Assemblymember Sabrina Cervantes, and Western Water GM Craig Miller attended.



- Attended a celebration with General Manager Adel Hagekhalil and other officials from Metropolitan and the Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency to celebrate the \$211 million High Desert Water Bank, Metropolitan's largest-ever investment in groundwater storage. After three years of construction, the first stage of this critical new groundwater storage project is complete, and water is flowing into storage, significantly increasing Southern California's water supply reliability in the face of a rapidly changing climate. Metropolitan will be able to store and withdraw up to 70,000 acre-feet of water annually to serve the annual needs of 210,000 Southern California homes. Once operating at full capacity, the water bank will provide Metropolitan an additional storage capacity of 280,000 acre-feet of water, comparable in size to Castaic Lake, nearly double the size of Lake Perris and four times the capacity of Big Bear Lake. Joining me were Directors John Morris, Jacque McMillan, Brenda Dennstedt, and Matt Petersen. In addition, AVEK Chair George Lane, General Manager Matt Knudson, and Assistant Deputy Director of Los Angeles County Public Works Russ Bryden, and Assistant Director of Administration of Los Angeles County Public Works Anthony Nyivih.



- Attended the celebration of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area Drainage Improvement Project, where Metropolitan provided funding for the project, which supports the Pacific flyway, recovers endangered species, protects agricultural lands, and reduces flood risk. By partnering on investments in projects like these, we can ensure a healthy ecosystem that reinforces the recovery of species, controls invasive species and improves water quality while also supporting a diverse and robust statewide economy. In attendance were Directors Tana McCoy, Miguel Luna, and Russell Lefevre. Also in attendance was Nina Hawk, Bay-Delta Initiatives Group Manager, along with other Metropolitan staff.



### Speaking Engagements/Events

- Provided congratulatory remarks at the October 2023 Fall Service Awards Luncheon, paying tribute to employees for their years of service and dedication to the organization, which was also attended by General Manager Adel Hagekhalil. I was particularly pleased to acknowledge Yvette Martinez's 20-year tenure at Metropolitan. The General Manager and I were joined by Directors Jacque McMillan, Brenda Dennstedt, Anthony Fellow, and Stephen Faessel.





### Other Activities

- Celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Quantification Settlement Agreement with Board members and Metropolitan staff. The Quantification Settlement Agreement united Metropolitan and California agricultural water districts using Colorado River water. Together, we have improved our water resources and made remarkable progress.



Issued a personal statement on the passing of my dear friend Cindy Montañez. In the statement, I wrote that she "... had a love for nature and hiking, as well as tackling trails of public policy. In 2022, as we faced dire drought conditions while supporting turf replacement incentives to conserve water, Cindy, a Councilmember in San Fernando, spoke up for the trees. Since then, we at Metropolitan have been in the process of rolling out a program to protect the tree canopy to prevent heat island effects as we conserve water by eliminating turf. Cindy will be remembered, and her work will continue to guide and inspire us all.



On October 28<sup>th</sup> the Desert Sun published a lauditory article about Colorado River Board President J.B. Hamby, who also serves on the Board of the Imperial Irrigation District. There were substantial factual errors in a section about Mr. Hamby's election as it pertained to Metropolitan and my own involvement. The article states that I wanted the post of CRB president, and that when thwarted, I was attempting to force Dir. Peterson to vote for Jim Madaffer from the San Diego County Water Authority who was also running for the CRB post.

It suffices to state that I found out about the CRB's leadership election the weekend before the CRB vote from our General Manager, not Metropolitan's then-appointee to the CRB Board, Director Glen Peterson. I also had committed to appoint Director Cordero to the CRB Board in November '22, in effect making myself ineligible to run for the CRB presidency because I am not a member of the Board.

I called Director Peterson upon learning about the fast approaching CRB leadership election and he shared that other than Mr. Hamby, San Diego County Water Authority Director Jim Madaffer was also interested in the post of CRB President. Dir. Peterson expressed that he opposed both candidates. Mr. Hamby for what Dir. Peterson described as a lack of maturity, and Mr. Madaffer because Dir. Peterson has strong feelings against the San Diego County Water Authority over past litigation. Dir. Petersen shared that he preferred that incumbent CRB President Peter Nelson from the Coachella Valley Water District remain in the post, but had no strategy for assuring other votes, or for persuading Mr. Nelson to stand for re-election. Dir. Peterson blamed me for not being a candidate himself given my appointment of Dir. Gloria Cordero whose approval was pending by the Governor.

Dir. Peterson said to the Desert Sun that he was abruptly removed from the CRB board. Members of the Board are all witness to the fact that I reached out to every single member upon my election to discuss potential leadership positions. Dir. Peterson was one of two directors who did not respond or reply to my emails, calls and text messages in the months leading to January when I began the term. The bottom line is that he never asked me to retain his service on the CRB board, much less that there was a CRB leadership election in January 2023, until I asked.

Attached is an email I sent to Dir. Peterson after Mr. Hamby's election. When I removed Dir. Peterson from the Colorado River Adhoc Committee I did not make any board or public announcement about his removal. While we disagree mostly about his continued open hostility against the San Diego County Water Authority, I have done my best to demonstrate respect to Dir. Peterson for whom I have personal affection given my long past and positive acquaintance. However, he has been publicly speaking about the events I am mentioning here and I feel a responsibility to advise the board about my motives for removing him from the Colorado River Adhoc Committee, as well as from the Colorado River Board, especially now that other members of the news media have called to understand the events I just described:

EMAIL:

**From:** Ortega Jr.,Adan

**Sent:** Friday, January 13, 2023 4:01 AM

**To:** Peterson,Glen

**Cc:** Heather M. Repenning - City of Los Angeles; Miller,Marty C; De Jesus,David D; Hagekhalil,Adel; [Wheeler,Margie](#)

**Subject:** Notice of Removal from Adhoc Committee on Agricultural Conservation, Bay Delta and Colorado River Negotiations

Dear Director Petersen,

I was disappointed in your effort during the meeting of the Colorado River Board on January 11<sup>th</sup>, to remove an opportunity for compromise. You did so by suggesting the removal of the state's representatives to reduce the threshold of victory favoring one candidate for Chair. As you know, reaching such compromise was the preferred course during our recent discussions with the General Manager and board colleagues leading up to the CRB meeting. It is my understanding that the State's representatives were with instructions to remain neutral. Given your argument that you are a gubernatorial appointee not subject to deliberations at MWD, neutrality would have been a proper course as well until compromise could be reached.

Your actions were outside of any MWD policy principle, recent actions by the board, and contrary to the spirit of overcoming past disputes among the MWD family as well. You openly expressed willingness to act based upon your personal bias against San Diego. Thanks to the efforts of others, the outcome of the election of the CRB's officers was reached in compromise, and exacerbation of our internal issues are for the time being, averted.

It's my intention to reduce such risks in the future. I am using any available means to accelerate the appointment of Gloria Cordero as your replacement on the Colorado River Board. I also want to advise you that I am removing you from the Adhoc Committee on Agricultural Conservation, Bay-Delta and Colorado River Negotiations. The administrative code stipulates that members of adhoc committees serve at the Chair's pleasure. I am asking that staff consultations continue with your alternate. Given your experience and knowledge I regret having to take this action, but I wish to avert similar risks within my limited means. Thank you for your past service.

Adán Ortega

Chair of the Board

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

### **Regularly Scheduled/Ongoing Meetings**

- I continue to meet regularly to review the board's organizational issues and coordinate activities with the Board Vice Chairs and Department Heads.