

September 6, 2011

R. Sean Randolph, Chair
San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission
50 California Street, Suite 2600
San Francisco, CA 94111



Via email

Dear Chairman Randolph, Commissioners, and Staff:

The Marin Conservation League submitted a letter in February, 2011, in support of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission's ongoing efforts to amend the Bay Plan by incorporating a section on climate change and related policies. We have now reviewed the Fourth Revised Preliminary Recommendations and submitted informal comments at the informative public hearing on September 1. Encouraged by several of the Commissioners to read the revised recommendations *closely*, we have done so and wish to offer the following comments before you take action on October 6.

At the outset, we recognize that BCDC's conservation mission of protecting the Bay has always involved a dynamic tension between ensuring a healthy ecosystem and viable economy at the land/water interface. This tension has been made infinitely more complex by the urgency and uncertainties of projected climate change and rising sea levels. The revised recommendations reflect a balancing act that raises some questions for which we offer specific suggestions:

Specific suggestions for substantive or clarifying text revisions

1. The definition of the term "sustainability" in *Finding j.* (Climate Change) is helpful. However, the term is used in several different contexts with somewhat different meaning: Under Tidal Marshes and Tidal Flats, in *Finding l.* "sustainability of ecosystem restoration projects. . ." and in *Policy 6* ". . . monitoring program to assess the sustainability of the project, the term describes the ability of the ecosystem to maintain itself over time. Later, in *Finding r.* (Climate Change), ". . . measures that will enhance project resiliency and sustainability," the term is not qualified but appears to focus on economic viability over time. Under *Finding w.* (Climate Change), "Plan and Design new development and communities for long-term sustainability in the face of climate change," the term appears to refer to sustaining economic and possibly social viability over time. In *Policy 6 (i.)*, "advance regional sustainability, encourage infill development and job creation, and provide diverse housing served by transit," the term draws its definition from the Sustainable Communities Strategy, which links land use around transit as a means of reducing vehicle miles and greenhouse gas emissions, with provision of affordable housing.

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These are sufficiently different applications of the term to warrant a brief qualifier *each time* the term is used.

2. In *Policy 6* (Tidal Marshes and Tidal Flats), *item f.* should read: “rates of colonization by native vegetation (or plant species);”.
3. *Finding p.* (Climate Change) should acknowledge that conflicts will arise if attempts are made to provide affordable infill housing in shoreline areas vulnerable to flooding, in satisfaction of SB 375 objectives. For example, several such areas in Marin County that could be candidates for housing of up to 30 units/acre density are clearly shown as subject to flooding in the BCDC maps and text.
4. *Finding w.* (Climate Change) paraphrases the California Climate Adaptation Strategy: “The strategy recommends that decision guidance strategies frame cost-benefit analyses so that all public and private costs and *benefits* are appropriately considered.” Does the Strategy account for ecosystem services, which are rarely monetized as benefits in this kind of calculus and therefore could be outweighed by more traditional economic benefits?

The Strategy does *allude* to such “services” of tidal wetlands and living shorelines as providing “natural resiliency,” and “natural flood protection,” and (in other contexts) carbon sequestration. *Policy 3* acknowledges that ecosystem services should be protected along with public safety, but doesn’t clearly define what these services are. *Policy 4* should make this connection! Thus, ecosystem enhancement should be given more than just “special consideration” and “encouraged”; it should be prioritized for offering highly beneficial services, possibly at a fraction of the cost of structural strategies.

5. For the reasons stated in Item 5, above, we find *Policy 7* problematic in the least! The opening paragraph, which gives a rationale for case-by-case evaluation of projects proposed in vulnerable areas, offers no guidance as to the meaning of “public benefits,” but then proceeds to list types of development that have “regional benefits” and should be encouraged. The first involves remediation, which we acknowledge as important to the health of the Bay. The next two involve urban development. Natural resource restoration and environmental enhancement, whose benefits include ecosystem services that are fundamental to long term *natural* resilience of baylands in the face of climate change and sea level rise, are given fourth place in the list of four! This belies a previous finding under Climate Change (g.) that restoring tidal marshes can integrate adaptation, mitigation such as carbon sequestration, and flood protection, as well as “provide habitat, and may protect lives, property, and ecosystems.” Roughly 80 percent of the Bay’s naturally resilient intertidal system has been lost over the past 160 years. It seems only *natural* that restoring this ecosystem for its “public benefits” would be given highest priority!

With these reservations, we continue to applaud your perseverance in working with diverse interests around the Bay and taking leadership in educating the public in the urgent planning needs prompted by rising sea level and the need for regional adaptation strate-

gies. The Bay Plan, with these amendments, will continue to serve as a blueprint for preserving the Bay and its surrounding shoreline.

As an organization that has been involved in study of issues involving land use, parks and open space, transportation, water, and climate change for more than 75 years, MCL is ready to support fourth revision amendments to the Bay Plan, with the qualifications expressed in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nona Dennis".

Nona Dennis, Vice President

cc. Supervisor Kathrin Sears