



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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California Tribes and Fishermen Speak Out Against California Voluntary Water Agreements

Sacramento, CA – Today, Tribal members, fishing families, youth, and community allies are hosting a rally and public comment in opposition to the Bay-Delta Plan and proposed Voluntary Water Agreements (VAs) at the California State Water Board in Sacramento. The action takes place during the final day of State Water Board hearings, marking the last opportunity for public input on a plan that would impact rivers, salmon, and drinking water across California. It comes after two days of strong comments and panels opposing the plan by Tribes, Bay-Delta residents, environmental groups, and fishermen.

Opposition to the Voluntary Agreements has grown as new federal actions threaten additional water exports from the Delta. Gary Mulcahy, Government Liaison of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, warned, “The clueless SWRCB continues to advocate for an 8-year experiment that fails to meet water, environmental, and aquatic species needs on so many levels as the VAs currently stand.” He added, “And, now with the Trump administration’s ROD on Action 5 promising water deliveries of an additional 130,000 to 180,000 acre feet out of the Delta, the VAs can no longer be considered even partially viable.”

If adopted, the Bay-Delta Plan and VAs would reshape water management across nearly every watershed feeding the Bay-Delta, including the Sacramento, Feather, American, Yuba, Trinity, and Klamath Rivers, threatening drinking water supplies and recreation for tens of millions of Californians. Advocates warn the plan prioritizes large agricultural water users while undermining river health, Tribal Sovereignty, and fishing communities statewide.

“Replacing water quality protections with Voluntary Agreements puts the needs of corporations and agriculture above drinking water protections, communities, and rivers,” said Regina Chichizola, Executive Director of Save California Salmon. “The VA pathway ignores years of Tribal, scientific, and public input and sets a dangerous precedent that voluntary compliance can replace California's pollution laws. We have no idea why Newsom continues to push them.

Yesterday, Delta Tribes testified they were shut out of the process, despite being seriously impacted. Vince LaPena from the Wilton Rancheria testified, “For Wilton Rancheria, Delta conditions directly affect cultural practices, subsistence activities, and stewardship responsibilities. Salmon and other aquatic species are not merely ecological indicators; they are integral to the Tribe’s cultural identity, traditional knowledge systems, food sovereignty, and responsibilities to future generations.” Other Tribes testified they were not consulted or included in the VA process, despite having critical connections with, and rights to, the waters impacted.

Fishing communities are also urging the board to choose regulation instead of Voluntary Agreements. Vance Staplin, Executive Director of the Golden State Salmon Association, emphasized, “Water diversions are devastating California’s largest salmon runs, shutting down commercial fishing for three years and causing serious hardship for fishing families, businesses, and communities.” He called on the State Water Board to act, stating that “the State Board has the sole authority to restore these salmon runs and must reject Governor Newsom’s backroom water deal, listen to the facts, and require the river flows salmon need to survive.”

Morning Star Gali, Pit River Tribal member and Executive Director of Indigenous Justice, warned that the VAs deepen long-standing harm to Tribal communities. “After decades of fighting for clean rivers, salmon restoration, and the remediation of toxic mercury contamination, Tribal peoples are once again being forced to carry the burden of protecting our waterways for current and future generations,” Gali said. “The VA’s role in privatizing water, prioritizing corporate profit over people, must be directly addressed. We are at a critical moment, and we must act now to stop this harm.”

Youth and Tribal community members say this is a defining moment. Onjalee Harrison, a Karuk Tribal youth and 8th-grade student traveling to Sacramento, said, “Without enough water, our fishing traditions and ceremonies like Boat Dances are at risk. As Native people, it is our responsibility to protect the fish, the river, and our future, which is why I oppose Voluntary Agreements that would dramatically impact my life and so many others.”

CALL TO ACTION

Save California Salmon urges the public to attend the rally, give public comment, and stand up for clean water, salmon, and Tribal rights before the hearings conclude.

Rally for Clean Water, Salmon, and Tribal Rights

When: Friday, January 30, 2026 | 12:00 PM

Where: Outside of the California State Water Board (CalEPA Building), Sacramento

To watch today's powerful testimony to California from Tribal leaders, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjlasXr-zNg>. Testimony starts at minute -3:33

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