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GOVERNOR VETOES CLEAN WATER BILL
Environmental Groups Question Governor's Commitment to Accountability

San Francisco, CA. The California Coastkeeper Alliance (CCKA), a coalition of 12 Waterkeeper groups spanning the coast from the Oregon border to San Diego, today expressed strong concern over the Governor's veto of SB 1001 (Perata), which would have improved the accountability of the state's water agencies in protecting the health of California's waterways. State and federal laws require California's nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards to decide on discharge permits and take enforcement actions against polluters. However, there is no direct way for the public to hold these agencies accountable when they fail to do this. For example, as of August 2007, over 20% of pollution discharge permits statewide had expired; just two Regional Water Boards accounted for 75% of the expired permits. Similarly, two Regional Water Boards failed to issue legally mandated minimum penalties in over 75% of cases where such penalties were required by law. Only a case-by-case appeals process currently exists; there is no process for addressing systemic, agency-wide problems. In light of examples such as these, the Governor's veto of SB 1001 appears to directly contradict his position in his own "Action Plan for California's Environment," in which he declares that "[g]overnment should be held accountable for environmental protection to the same extent as private parties and should be held to the same enforcement standards."

"The public currently has no meaningful way to hold failing Regional Water Board programs accountable or to force them to implement even the minimum requirements of the law," said Linda Sheehan, Executive Director of CCKA. "SB 1001 would have allowed the public the ability to petition the state to transfer that authority to an agency that would actually carry it out."

SB 1001 also addressed the makeup of the Regional Water Boards, for which the majority of seats are set aside for special interest groups. SB 1001 would have improved Regional Water Board accountability to the public by eliminating seats for special interests and ensuring that all Regional Water Board members act on behalf Californians at large.

"Clean water is the currency of California's environment and economy, and the state is running short," concluded Ms. Sheehan. "We are surprised and concerned that the Governor would veto a bill that increases government accountability on this critical issue, especially in light of growing information about the rapidly increasing stress on California's limited supply of clean water."

The California Coastkeeper Alliance provides a statewide voice for safeguarding California's waters, and its world-renowned coast and ocean, for the benefit of all Californians. Member organizations are Klamath Riverkeeper, Humboldt Baykeeper, Russian Riverkeeper, San Francisco Baykeeper, Monterey Coastkeeper, San Luis Obispo

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Coastkeeper, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, Ventura County Coastkeeper, Santa Monica Baykeeper, Orange County Coastkeeper and its Inland Empire Waterkeeper chapter, and San Diego Baykeeper. See www.cacoastkeeper.org.

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