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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 4, 2014

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Chairman and Commissioners
Attn: Office of the Chief Clerk
P.O. Box 13087
MC-105
Austin, TX 78711

Dear Chairman and Commissioners:

I wish to express my strong opposition to the LCRA Emergency Order request before you and share with you some of the many reasons it is ill-advised, inequitable, and permanently damaging to the citizens, rice farmers, economy, and environment of the lower Colorado River basin.

As you well know, LCRA's actions over the past several years in response to the drought have had a tremendously negative impact on the agricultural community and local economy in Matagorda County and surrounding areas. Yet once again, as evidenced by this Emergency Order, there is a complete lack of effort to share the burden of the drought's crippling effects and respond in a spirit of collaboration. The complex and critical decisions that came before the LCRA board were unfairly minimized to an upper-basin versus lower-basin battle with the irrigators bearing the brunt of the sacrifice. The Texas Legislature recently proved that a true solution to water woes can only be found by stepping beyond the "wants" of a specific region and instead working to meet the needs of an entire spectrum of water users.

In the absence of a meaningful and productive stakeholder process, this Emergency Order pending before you is a product of political pressure from the Highland Lakes recreational users. And, whereas, past efforts were aimed at crippling the rice farming industry, this latest stunt drives a stake directly into the heart of the lower basin by setting an unprecedented 1.1 million acre-foot trigger level creating a first-time, unparalleled minimum recreational pool level designed to meet the very public demands of Highland Lakes area residents. Even after



reservoir levels have greatly recovered, the Emergency Order continues to cut off water for irrigation and environmental flows, and never turns it back on again.

This Emergency Order has far-reaching consequences that I hope you will fully consider. Most visibly, it will shut down rice farming in lower basin communities. This will have a significantly dire impact on our local and statewide economy. It will mean a loss of jobs, a loss in local sales and property tax collections, and ultimately a reduction in state education funding due to a decrease in student enrollment. The approval of this Emergency Order will also result in an environmental emergency for the river, bays, and estuaries and a threat to our water quality due to the lack of sufficient downstream flows. Fish and wildlife habitats, including state and federal endangered species, will be harmed, and recreational and commercial fishing threatened.

Most concerning to me is the dangerous precedent set by this Emergency Order, which was approved in the absence of a fair and collaborative stakeholder process. The majority of LCRA Board members opted to ignore the original and intended purpose of Lakes Travis and Buchanan -- to supply water -- in favor of recreational users, while rejecting a proposal to establish an accelerated stakeholder process aimed at developing a more balanced request. LCRA then subsequently indicated in its application to TCEQ that action wasn't needed before the end of February. Please take note and question why a stakeholder process was ignored in the development of this Emergency Order.

I am deeply disappointed by the members of the LCRA Board who have made such a polarizing decision and neglected their duties to uphold LCRA's mission in a fair and balanced manner. As such, it is my belief that this Emergency Order before you should be rejected and the 2012 Emergency Order instead be utilized in response to current conditions. Thank you for your efforts and consideration in making this tough decision.

Sincerely,

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

Dennis Bonnen
District 25