

# COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE REMOTE OVERSIGHT HEARING

October 20, 2021 11:00 a.m. ET

Oversight Hearing on “Colorado River Drought Conditions and Response Measures – Day Two.”

## Questions for the Record for Mr. Adel Hagekhalil, General Manager, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

### Questions from Rep. Grace Napolitano (CA-32)

1. Water recycling is a critical tool in the West, where drought is becoming more common and severe. I have bills to increase federal support for water recycling, including a bill that will help support large-scale water recycling projects like the one the Metropolitan Water District is advancing with partners in Arizona and Nevada.

a. Can you describe some of the benefits of large-scale water recycling projects for communities in the Colorado River Basin and across the West facing severe drought conditions?

*Currently, much of Southern California’s wastewater is discharged to the Pacific Ocean. This is a legacy of when urban communities and regulatory agencies considered sewage a waste rather than a precious resource central to the water portfolio. Our region has implemented dozens of innovative local water recycling programs, including the world-renown Groundwater Replenishment System in Orange County. Large scale water recycling projects, like our Regional Recycled Water Project (RRWP), will bolster this legacy and maintain the region as the nation’s leader in recycling water for potable consumption. At full build out the RRWP could produce 168,000 acre-feet of water per year providing a new sustainable source of drinking water for roughly half a million families in Southern California. This program is being pursued through a significant partnership within our region between the Metropolitan Water District and the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts.*

*Southern Nevada Water Authority, Central Arizona Water Conservation District, and the Arizona Department of Water Resources are partnering with us to develop this project that could benefit all three states. If they eventually invest in a portion of our recycling program, Metropolitan can leave that amount of its own Colorado supply in Lake Mead behind Hoover Dam for our partners to use. Through existing and new agreements on the Colorado River, the Lower Basin states can improve their reliability through a single project. And this will help the entire Colorado River Basin.*

b. Do you believe that large-scale water recycling projects, like the one you and your partners in the Lower Colorado River Basin are pursuing, can be an important part of the response to climate change and drought for the entire Basin?

*Yes. Until now Metropolitan has never advanced a proposal to build our own recycled supply that we would own and operate. The Regional Recycled Water Project will be our first foray into producing local supply at scale that makes sense for a regional agency. At full buildout, the RRWP*

*would be the largest wastewater purification facility in the United States and could help transform the reliability of supplies in the Colorado River basin. This shift in approach acknowledges the steep new challenges facing our water industry. Climate change, water quality degradation, increasing salinity, and regulatory impacts all threaten our supply reliability. In the face of these challenges, we now know that the treatment technologies exist to be able to purify wastewater for largescale potable use. The scale of this endeavor matches the regional capabilities of Metropolitan and would leverage the infrastructure we already have in place to develop a reliable drought proof water supply for the Lower Basin states.*

**c.** Do you believe that federal investments can accelerate large-scale water recycling projects so we can respond and prepare for rapidly changing climate conditions as quickly as possible?

*Yes. With our imported water supplies from the Colorado River and the State Water Project facing unprecedented drought and future threats from climate change, we need new federal financing tools to help advance visionary multi-benefit projects like the RRWP. Metropolitan supports H.R. 4099, the Large-Scale Water Recycling Project Investment Act, and appreciates the inclusion of this bill in H.R. 3684, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The creation of a new Bureau of Reclamation program to support large regional recycling projects in the arid west will help the entire Colorado River Basin prepare for the future.*

*Additionally, robust Title XVI funding for smaller recycled water projects is needed to accelerate the development of local water supply projects. Metropolitan supports H.R. 1015, the Water Recycling Investment and Improvement Act, and H.R. 3404, the FUTURE Western Water Infrastructure and Drought Resiliency Act and appreciates all the funding provided for water recycling projects in H.R. 3684, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.*