

## **State to Metropolitan Water Board: Obey**

*Pressured by Newsom Administration, MWD Board Turns on Its General Manager*

Press release from the California Water Impact Network

While the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California has raised a lot of hackles over its proposal to raise water rates by 17% during the next two years, it's also on the hook for



something that could spike rates to stratospheric heights for a generation: the construction of the \$20+ billion Delta Tunnel, a top priority of the Newsom administration.

The tunnel is the latest zombie iteration of the Peripheral Canal that Jerry Brown tried to push through during his first term as governor in the 1980s. It would shunt water from the Sacramento River under the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta to Southern California farms and cities.

The proposed Delta Tunnel shares the same problems that bedeviled the Peripheral Canal. It would be prohibitively expensive, burdening State Water Project ratepayers and California taxpayers; it would further degrade the Delta, the largest and most important estuary in the western continental United States; and it would devastate California's already struggling salmon fisheries.

Metropolitan is the largest urban water district in the state and the biggest customer of the State Water Project. Without a funding commitment from Metropolitan, the Delta Tunnel will not be built. Under the leadership of Adel Hagekhalil, Metropolitan is taking a close look at its long-term business plan, factoring in declining water sales, climate change, and anticipated regulatory actions on diversions from the Delta and the Colorado River. This analysis may lead to a recommendation to Metropolitan's board of directors to not fund the project.

But even the possibility of a No Tunnel vote has led to an attempted mutiny by pro-Tunnel hardliners on Metropolitan's staff and board.

Metropolitan's CFO, who sits on the board of the entity created to finance the Delta Tunnel, filed a complaint against Hagekhalil, claiming he created a hostile work environment by excluding her from meetings about the District's business plan. These baseless accusations were reviewed by Metropolitan's board in closed session this morning, while Hagekhalil was out of the country on vacation. The board's move coincides with relentless pressure by Governor Gavin Newsom on Metropolitan to support the tunnel.

Max Gomberg, a board member of the California Water Impact Network and a water policy expert, decried the move against Hagekhalil as a political power play designed to ram through a prohibitively expensive boondoggle that subverts both legal and democratic processes.

*“Weaponizing management disputes as a pretext for removing a political opponent is a new low for the Newsom administration,” said Gomberg. “It will clearly stop at nothing to pursue antiquated and ruinously costly water projects that enrich powerful people at the expense of ratepayers and the environment. The Tunnel will not create new water, nor will it protect Californians from drought. It’s simply a means to expedite the transfer of more water to powerful interests.”*

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