Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 19, 2019

Michael Stoker
Region IX Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
75 Hawthorne St. (ORA-1)
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Regional Administrator Stoker:

We write in opposition to the California Department of Conservation's application for an aquifer exemption to expand oil and gas production in the Cat Canyon Oil Field. Approving this project would fail to account for the contributions greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions will have on the current climate crisis, the increased risks to the air quality of the region and the impacts to our local water supply.

If permitted, the three proposed projects would allow for more than 700 new oil wells near Santa Maria, California. It would more than triple the current oil production in Santa Barbara County. We are concerned that increased oil production will exacerbate the impacts of the current climate crisis on our environment. Recent data from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) shows that overall GHG emissions from the oil and gas industry increased between 2016-2017.

The harmful practice of flaring was also up 28 percent nationwide. Flaring is a particularly harmful practice as it wastes large amounts of energy resources and emits significant amounts of carbon dioxide as well as soot-forming and particulate matter pollution into our atmosphere. According to the EPA, exposure to soot or particulate matter particles can be harmful to the lungs and heart. They have been linked to a variety of problems such as premature death in people with heart or lung disease, aggravated asthma and decreased lung function. In 2017 alone, the oil industry flared off at least as much gas to heat all the houses in the state of New Jersey.

Additionally, the projects that are being considered for this aquifer exemption rely heavily on the use of thermal enhancement techniques, which includes steam injection and steam flooding, to extract crude oil from 2,000 to 5,000 feet below the surface. Although the exemption is for an underlying aquifer that has existing hydrocarbons, it lays below a fresh water aquifer that has numerous wells. These are a key source of drinking water for Santa Maria residents and irrigation for nearby farmlands.

We are concerned the extraction techniques have the potential to pollute these invaluable water resources on which our communities heavily rely. A preliminary study from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) found that 4 of the 16 wells in the Orcutt Oil Field, in Santa Barbara

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County, had geochemical indicators of oil-filled fluids mixed with groundwater. In Ventura County, the USGS similarly found groundwater contamination near the Fox Canyon aquifer. These results from the USGS raise significant concerns regarding the risks increased oil production poses to our health and safety.

It is our understanding that the USGS has proposed to study the potential impacts to groundwater at the Cat Canyon Oil Field. This study must be completed before the EPA moves forward with any decision to grant an exemption from the Clean Drinking Water Act. The impacts to our public health and environment are too great not to assess.

Sincerely,

Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator