

Environmental Coalition Supports CEQA Enhancements, Opposes CEQA Exemptions

To the Honorable members of the Orange and Los Angeles County Delegations

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Roderick Wright

RE: **SUPPORT** for Targeted Enhancements to CEQA for Sustainable Projects
OPPOSE CEQA exemptions for AEG and the Richmond Refinery

We are writing to support a constructive dialogue with policy leaders about improving CEQA as it relates to better planned projects, while also strongly opposing legislative exemptions from the current requirements of CEQA.

For the last 40 years, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) has informed decision makers about project impacts, required feasible mitigation measures be adopted to reduce impacts, and allowed the public at large to provide important feedback on the proposed project. It was written in the 1970s, at a time when California was facing different challenges. Now in 2010, there is room for improvement. For example, environmentally friendly and thoughtful projects that promote development in transit-rich areas, create walkable neighborhoods, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions are treated the same way under CEQA as a development in an outlying auto-oriented area. Yet reasonable conversations to address concerns like these cannot occur when CEQA itself is under assault.

Last year, Majestic Realty received a legislative exemption for its 75,000-seat stadium in the City of Industry. Opposition to this exemption was clear and present. How will decision makers make informed decisions about local projects when the decision is made at the state level? How will mitigation measures to reduce traffic impacts, noise and water pollution get adopted when the project is exempted from CEQA's requirements? How will the public's comments ever get heard when the decision is made at the state level in the dead of night? The very foundation of CEQA was eroded away when this one legislative exemption was made. When CEQA was signed into law in 1970 by then-Governor Reagan, its intent was to provide information to decision makers as they evaluated the impacts of projects on their communities and the environment. It was not to play favorites with wealthy project proponents, wealthy campaign contributors, and thereby undermine local control.

What was claimed to be a "one time" legislative exemption has exploded into a free for all where every developer, regardless of the project's benefit or detriment to the community, wants an exemption from the Legislature. Now others, like AEG (Los Angeles) and the Chevron Refinery (Richmond) are looking for their own exemptions from the Legislature. These projects, an entertainment venue/sports arena and an oil refinery, are not the types of projects that should be receiving exemptions. Instead, they are

distracting conservation and community groups, as well as decision makers, from a constructive dialogue about how to improve CEQA.

There is an opportunity for leadership to target specific modifications to CEQA. We believe you should seize that leadership opportunity. For example, amendments that make it easier for sustainable green projects, such as transit friendly developments, should get streamlined permitting. With your leadership we can change the dialogue, find common ground, and collectively support sustainable projects that meet other legislative mandates.

The undersigned groups sincerely support a constructive dialogue with policy leaders about improving CEQA and strongly oppose any legislative exemptions from the requirements of CEQA.

Sincerely,

Audubon California
Bolsa Chica Land Trust
Canyon Land Conservation Fund
Earth Resource Foundation
Endangered Habitats League
Friends of Coyote Hills
Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks
Hills For Everyone
Huntington Beach Tree Society, Inc.
Laguna Canyon Conservancy

OC Interfaith Coalition for the Environment
OC League of Conservation Voters
OC Chapter of the California Native Plant
Orange County Coastkeeper
Residents for Responsible Desalination
Rural Canyons Conservation Fund
Saddleback Canyons Conservancy
Sea and Sage
Silverado-Modjeska Recreation & Park District
Wild Heritage Planners