



***Testimony of Dr. Catherine Garoupa White, Executive Director, Central Valley Air Quality Coalition (CVAQ) and Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (EJAC) member to the California Joint Legislative Committee on Climate Change Policies - Thursday, April 21, 2022***

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. The San Joaquin Valley is the most polluted air basin in the U.S. for fine particles and one of the most polluted for ozone, causing epidemic levels of sickness pre-COVID19. The pandemic layered on to catastrophic climate-fueled wildfires, lack of access to health care, and many other intersectional issues that our communities suffer with. Some of the things that keep me up at night are stories of parents holding their children while they turn blue, rushing them to the emergency room with breathing problems, questioning if kids can safely play outside. Stories of loved ones who have died too soon stick with you. I am inspired by the passion, innovation, creativity, and wisdom of the environmental justice (EJ) movement; we are not a monolith so I can only speak from my perspective. The San Joaquin Valley (the Valley) is Ground Zero for climate impacts. Historically, we have some of the most productive oil fields in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> We're the most agriculturally productive region ever in humankind.<sup>2</sup> We have growing goods movement infrastructure. These sectors have to be addressed. *An over-reliance on models, plans, and incentives clearly is not working to meet clean air goals in the San Joaquin Valley.*

California has impressive physical and cultural abundance: the oldest living trees in the Bristlecone Pine, the oldest living plant in the Creosote Bush, the tallest living things in the Coast Redwoods, the largest living trees in the Giant Sequoias.<sup>3</sup> We also have rich cultural diversity, like the farmworker movement that grew out of the Valley. This abundance is juxtaposed with the cost of producing these benefits: some of the largest human alterations to our waterways. The San Joaquin Valley is the largest alteration of the Earth's surface attributable to humankind due to mining groundwater for agriculture.<sup>4</sup> We are the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, yet we have some of the highest poverty rates in the U.S.<sup>5</sup> These benefits are coming at a high cost; the costs are not distributed equally. California's geography is widely variable culturally and physically; root problems remain the same: **racism, exploitation, and extraction.** To meet clean air and climate goals we need **direct reductions.**

The California Air Resources Board's (CARB) original charge is to meet clean air goals. While they are hailed as a leader, clearly for clean air we have a long way to go. CARB has made significant commitments on cars and trucks and shows high compliance rates. Yet there are broken processes with air agencies, a misuse of money and power:

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration. (November 2018). California State Profile and Energy Estimates. <https://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=CA>

<sup>2</sup> O'Connell, D. and Peters, S. (2021). *In the Struggle: Scholars and the Fight Against Industrial Agribusiness in California*. New Village Press.

<sup>3</sup> Selby, W. (2019). *Rediscovering the Golden State*. (4<sup>th</sup> edition).

<sup>4</sup> Galloway, D.L., and Riley, F.S. (1999). San Joaquin Valley, California—Largest human alteration of the Earth's surface. In *Land Subsidence in the United States*, Galloway, D.L., Jones, D.R., and Ingebritsen, S.E. (Eds.). U.S. Geological Survey Circular 1182. (pp. 23-34). <http://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/circ1182/>

<sup>5</sup> Fox, L. and Burns, K. (2021). Supplemental Poverty Measure: 2020. U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-275.pdf>

1. I serve on the Stockton steering committee for the Community Air Protection Program, what's intended to be a community-engaged, participatory process. Unfortunately as managed by the San Joaquin Valley Air District, it's been an ongoing debate on how to equitably invest dollars, with \$5 million dollars punitively removed because we didn't vote for measures that the air district wanted for one of the largest pollution sources without accountability or oversight mechanisms requested by the committee, a dangerous precedent of environmental justice community members being punished for speaking to their priorities.<sup>6</sup>
2. I for many years have worked on the broken Emission Reduction Credit program managed by the San Joaquin Valley Air District, in some ways a parallel to cap-and-trade, for criteria air pollutants. The failure of this system demonstrates deep corruption with offsetting that not coincidentally has favored the oil industry. Despite CARB, USEPA, and the air district agreeing that the program has failed, there is no plan to reconcile the known damage to communities.<sup>7</sup>

CARB's oversight over air districts, who control important stationary and areawide sources, is failing. We need to ensure that air districts are adopting and enforcing the best rules and policies.

The Scoping Plan process has been fast, overwhelming, and has cut out many opportunities for substantive input from frontline communities, exhibiting an underlying dynamic that continues to disadvantage groups with less resources. Since June we've had 15 official EJAC meetings, not including prep, debrief, workgroups or workshops. Many times we have raised concerns about the alignment of the timeline and the opportunity to provide substantive feedback to shape the modeling.

Modeling is a fundamental aspect of the Scoping Plan; models are tools used as a means to an end. If you put faulty assumptions into a model, you get bad outputs. *Staff have not fully released the underlying assumptions, inhibiting our ability to provide substantive feedback. Now scenarios have been released and staff are recommending a scenario before we've fully analyzed what has been modeled.* From the start, CARB staff have stated that engineered carbon capture and storage is required. There are unrealistic assumptions in the modeling, like a 90% capture rate for engineered carbon capture and storage; furthermore they are underestimating the potential for natural sequestration. We are not on track to meet 2030 goals. Models are theory; we need application.

Not all solutions can be technology-based. There are multiple proposed projects in our region to lock carbon underground forever with little to no consequence; I wish magical thinking worked. We have to be realistic, and move from aspirations to equity centered actions; how we achieve our goals is as important as achieving our goals. I have hope that groups like CVAQ and EJAC can co-power with our partners and frontline communities to make investments in zero-carbon

---

<sup>6</sup> Becker, R. (2022). Has California's landmark law cleaned communities' dirty air? <https://calmatters.org/environment/2022/01/california-air-quality-environmental-justice-law/>

<sup>7</sup> California Air Resources Board. (2020). Review of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Emission Reduction Credit System. [https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/SJV\\_ERC\\_FINAL\\_20200604.pdf](https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/SJV_ERC_FINAL_20200604.pdf)

infrastructure and equitable public services that support community well-being and sustainable development.

Gratitude to all who helped develop the robust draft EJAC recommendations. It was a collaborative effort by committee members, informed by partners and community engagement. The BEEP coalition held community listening sessions on building decarbonization in EJ communities. A partnership of San Joaquin Valley based EJAC members and organizations held a community engagement workshop February 22nd with over 100 participants.<sup>8</sup> The overarching question we asked: *What would you tell the Governor and the state that you want in the Scoping Plan and for climate justice?* I submitted a “mental map” sketch (see below) with key themes: optimism and excitement for tailored investments in transportation, buildings, food - all these different sectors that affect people's daily lives - juxtaposed with the fear of continuing to be left behind by investments made for communities that don't look like the frontlines.

Often in sharing these bold visions, we hear from agencies: "That's not our authority," or "We can't do that right now." The Scoping Plan sends market and policy signals related to key technology choices; we want the right investments in our communities, *and* recognition that money and technology will not solve every problem. The plan provides direction on how to meet climate goals and must incorporate equity, resilience and justice; the chart at the end of the EJAC recommendations has actionable measures to meet our goals.<sup>9</sup> All CARB divisions and all state agencies must coordinate. Here are a few highlights from the draft EJAC recommendations:

**Land use and transportation** is an major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions; our communities need better connectivity, mobility and mass transit, and to continue the ambitious commitments to electrification. We need more investments in rapid busses, light rail, anti-displacement, affordable housing, walking.

**Industrialized agriculture** must also transition to agroecological practice; phase out dairy biogas and petrochemical-based pesticides, with at least a 50% reduction in pesticide use by 2030. We have to address forest health, tailoring solutions depending on the local ecosystems and communities. We need to embrace traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous practices, something we heard a lot in our community engagement workshop, and restore ecosystems across rural, urban, and suburban areas with priority for environmental justice communities.

The state needs to **phase out fossil fuels**, with continued investments in clean energy and **no reliance on climate dead ends like engineered carbon capture and storage**. This technology is unproven, risky, and these proposed projects are concentrated in frontline environmental justice communities. Last month's Committee hearing, the E3 modeler said we could meet our climate goals without engineered carbon capture and storage. Another false solution, **cap and trade** continues to concentrate pollution in EJ communities by design. It must be analyzed for its overall role; see pages 18-20 of the EJAC recommendations for details.

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.calcleanair.org/feb22/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/EJAC%20Workgroup%20DRAFT%20Recommendations\\_4\\_1\\_22.pdf](https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/EJAC%20Workgroup%20DRAFT%20Recommendations_4_1_22.pdf)

CA Health and Safety Code 38591A: “The state board, by July 1, 2007, shall convene an environmental justice advisory committee...to advise it in developing the scoping plan pursuant to Section 38561 and any other pertinent matter in implementing this division (emphasis added).” Meeting our climate goals is an ongoing task; **EJAC must be made permanent** with adequate resources to co-power solutions with EJ communities, to inform integration of equity across CARB, to provide critical ground truthing of the theory and models by connecting expertise from impacted community members and informing programs. We must move toward consultation, collaboration, and codesign. EJAC’s recommendations must be meaningfully integrated.

Legislators, in your oversight role, I urge you to direct CARB to:

1. Complete business as usual modeling for existing policies
2. Release all modeling assumptions and data
3. Conduct a full program review of cap and trade
4. Enforce existing rules and policies, so that we can understand why and where we are not on track and where adjustments need to be made.

Within your authority:

1. Increase community power over investments like AB 617 and the state budget.
2. Existing laws are inadequate; address cumulative and disproportionate impacts.
3. Pass bills for a just transition off of a fossil based, extractive economy; address development, oil and agriculture.

**Bold visions must be met with bold actions: California needs real zero, not net zero.**

