



June 29th, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
California State Capitol  
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Increased use of the Aliso Canyon natural gas storage facility

Dear Governor Newsom,

We are writing to you to express our serious concern with recent developments at the Aliso Canyon natural gas storage facility located in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Porter Ranch. In October of 2015, a well blowout at the facility led to the largest uncontrolled release of methane to the atmosphere from a single source in recorded history. After the blowout was stopped, progress was made in safety improvements and oversight of the facility, with the long-term goal – that you share – of facility closure.

Recent events have made it clear how important it is to reinforce that commitment now. While normal usage patterns typically result in relatively more use of stored gas in winter months, the 3,000 percent increase in withdrawals from the facility by the Southern California Gas Company (SoCal Gas) in the last two seasons compared to the time period right after the blowout is too much. Overreliance on the facility sets the dangerous precedent of delaying the phase-out of facility use ahead of its proposed closure dates, and needlessly delays the transition to the state's future renewable energy supply goals. The first gas withdrawal protocols for the facility call for gas withdrawals only as a "last resort" and that changed July 2019 despite key pipelines returning to service. While the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in new core demand patterns as residents stay home, we request you and your Administration make a renewed commitment to transparent metrics and a public process to deliberate the recent expansion of use of the facility. We also request that you provide direction to the California Public Utility Commission's (CPUC's) Energy Division to immediately act to prevent future unnecessary withdrawals from Aliso Canyon. In particular, we request that you convey to the CPUC that they should reinstate the initial Aliso Canyon gas withdrawal protocol from November 2017. The conditions that motivated the changes in the protocol no longer hold: For example, the major gas transmission

pipelines that were then out-of-service due to SoCal Gas' inadequate maintenance are now operational, if at reduced pressure. That the pipelines were out-of-service for two years is emblematic of SoCal Gas' lack of commitment to true preventative maintenance, and highlights the continuing risks to the communities surrounding the facility due to SoCal Gas' poor safety culture. It is in SoCal Gas' interests to maximize the use of the Aliso Canyon gas storage facility to justify its continued operation and the state's continued reliance on fossil fuels. However, there are important state climate goals that must be achieved by 2045, and keeping Aliso Canyon open unnecessarily prevents us from achieving those goals.

Furthermore, the residents around Aliso Canyon are still placed at risk by use of the facility now that the pipelines are back in service. These increased risks to public safety and our concern regarding increased gas withdrawals from the facility stem from pressures on regulatory oversight of the facility as a result of the economic impacts of the pandemic on the state's budget. We urge you to ensure that state personnel assigned to the facility be maintained, if not increased, given the risks posed by the facility to the surrounding communities. It is imperative that regulatory oversight be at least maintained to ensure compliance with all requirements. We know that a lack of regulatory oversight in the past directly resulted in the conditions that produced the 2015 well blowout.

Our constituents in the Porter Ranch and surrounding communities deserve more from the CPUC. These are families who live, work, go to school and recently have been spending much of their time at home in response to COVID-19, but not with any real peace of mind on feeling safer. Instead, they are burdened with anxiety and fears over something going terribly wrong under their feet. Only with your leadership on this issue will an expedited process to close Aliso Canyon be achieved.

Respectfully,



Christy Smith  
Assemblywoman, 38th District



Henry Stern  
Senator, 27th District



Brad Sherman  
Congressman, 30th District