Dear Secretary/Administrator:

Subject: Handbook on NEPA and CEQA: Integrating Federal and State Environmental Reviews

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) are pleased to announce the release of a new handbook, "NEPA and CEQA: Integrating Federal and State Environmental Reviews." This handbook, the result of a joint effort of CEQ and OPR, provides advice to Federal and California State agencies, applicants, project sponsors, and consultants on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) environmental review processes. CEQ and OPR benefitted from receiving a broad range of views and comments from Federal and California agency NEPA and CEQA practitioners.

NEPA and CEQA are similar, both in intent and in the review process (the analyses, public engagement, and document preparation) that they dictate. Both NEPA and CEQA promote coordination, improve public understanding, and lead to more informed decisions. Importantly, both statutes encourage a joint Federal and state review where a project requires both Federal and state approvals. Indeed, in such cases a joint review process can avoid redundancy, improve efficiency and interagency cooperation, and be easier for applicants and citizens to navigate. Nonetheless, there are differences that require careful coordination between the Federal and state agencies.

This handbook provides practitioners with an overview of the NEPA and CEQA processes, along with practical suggestions on developing a single environmental review process that can meet the requirements of both statutes, thereby avoiding unnecessary delay, confusion, and legal vulnerability. This handbook contains three main sections: a "Question and Answer" section that addresses the key similarities and differences between NEPA and CEQA; a framework for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between two or more agencies entering a joint NEPA/CEQA review process with the intention of clarifying responsibilities and avoiding potential conflicts; and information regarding the California Energy Commission licensing process for decisions on thermal power plants 50 megawatts and larger, which serves as the functional equivalent of a CEQA review.

We hope that you will find the handbook timely and informative, and that it will allow a focused use of agency resources as you confront the challenges of project planning and compliance with NEPA and CEQA.

Sincerely,

Nancy H. Sutley
Chair
Council on Environmental Quality

Date: 2-14-2014

Ken Alex
Director
Office of Planning and Research

Date: 2-18-2014