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Center for Biological Diversity Comments

Additional submitted attachment is included below.



June 17, 2022

California Energy Commission
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
VIA E-FILE

**RE: In the Matter of Distributed Energy Resources in California's Energy Future
Docket # 22-0II-01**

To the California Energy Commission,

The Center for Biological Diversity (“Center”) submits these comments on the June 1, 2022 Lead Commissioner Workshop to Launch Distributed Energy Resources in California’s Energy Future Proceeding. The Center appreciates the Energy Commission’s (“CEC”) work in commencing a critical proceeding by centering the dialogue on community engagement. In addition, this comment highlights: first, how distributed energy resources (“DERs”) are an integral solution to the State achieving its climate and equity goals; second, DERs are a cost-effective solution; and third, the importance of the CEC’s continued focus on meaningful community outreach to ensure that future distribution systems are adequately designed to meet disadvantaged community (“DAC”) needs.

I. DERs are a Key Solution to Meeting the State’s Climate and Equity Policies.

Consistent with climate science and equity, California must transition off fossil fuel electricity and to 100% renewable, just energy by 2030.¹ This is consistent with the domestic carbon reductions necessary to meet the U.S.’s equitable fair share to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, without carbon market mechanisms.² Similarly, California must take a more aggressive stance in the electricity generation sector to meet the SB 32 2030 GHG reduction target, as opposed to the current proposal in the Air Resources Board’s Climate Change Scoping Plan (“CARB Scoping Plan”).

¹ See e.g. United Nations Secretary General, Amid Backsliding on Climate, the Renewables Effort Now Must be Tripled (April 4, 2022) available at <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/articles/2022-04-04/amid-backsliding-climate-the-renewables-effort-now-must-be-tripled>

² Global 100% RE Strategy Group, Joint Declaration of the Global 100% Renewable Energy Strategy Group (2021) available at <https://global100restrategygroup.org/>.

The 2021 Joint Agency Report showed that it is possible to eliminate all combustion resources by 2045.³ That analysis, however, did not include DERs. Including DERs can accelerate our progress, in particular to meet SB 32. DERs can theoretically generate enough power to meet U.S. electricity needs multiple times over.⁴ And as emphasized at the workshop and the Order Instituting Informational Rulemaking (“OIIP”), California anticipates a “high DER” future; it is critical to leverage DERs to meet SB 32.

DERs can also cure feasibility issues raised by the SB 100 core scenario. For instance, adequate deployment of rooftop solar can minimize the need for the estimated million acres of land to meet the SB 100 core scenario’s proposal for utility-scale solar. Utility-scale solar also presents significant land use impacts to biodiversity and species and eliminates opportunities for natural carbon sinks.⁵ DERs similarly avoid the siting and affordability impacts of new transmission lines. Backlogs in interconnection queues for utility-scale resources, compounded by the time necessary to plan and build transmission creates a bottleneck preventing necessary buildout by 2030, the critical decade for GHG reduction.

Given the importance of DERs and the scale of the problem, it is certainly a step in the right direction for the CEC to coordinate this proceeding’s efforts with the 2022 Integrated Energy Policy Report Update (“IEPR”) and the Public Utilities Commission’s (“CPUC”) “High DER” proceeding,⁶ and the Center appreciates the commitment from the CEC and CPUC Commissioners to do so. In that regard, the CEC must revisit the IEPR’s reliance on the CARB Scoping Plan, which is not even approved yet. Like the SB 100 analysis, the CARB Scoping Plan similarly does not consider DERs. Furthermore, the CARB Scoping Plan’s current proposal fails to meet our climate and equity goals, in particular for the electricity generation sector, where CARB proposes an unnecessary buildout of 10GW of new gas-fired generation.⁷ The Center certainly supports coordination, but it is counterintuitive to coordinate with such an inequitable and still tentative proposal that does not recognize or even analyze the benefits of DERs, especially in regards to reliability. The CEC should coordinate DER efforts and the IEPR, but also revisit its reliance on the current proposed scenario in the CARB Scoping Plan.

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³ SB 100 2021 Joint Agency Report at 93, *available at* <https://www.energy.ca.gov/publications/2021/2021-sb-100-joint-agency-report-achieving-100-percent-clean-electricity>.

⁴ Lopez, Anthony et al. 2012. U.S. Renewable Energy Technical Potentials: A GIS-Based Analysis. National Renewable Energy Laboratory, *available at* <https://www.seia.org/sites/default/files/resources/NREL%20Renewable%20Resource%20in%20States%20Study.pdf>.

⁵ *See e.g.* Alta, Hot and Bothersome, *available at* <https://app.mailerlite.com/n3r9a7k7d5>.

⁶ CPUC Rulemaking 21-06-017.

⁷ *See e.g.* 128 Scientists and Academics Urge Governor Newsom and the California Air Resources Board to Fix Flawed Scoping Plan That Sets Back California’s Climate Goal (June 14, 2022) *available at* <https://caleja.org/2022/06/press-release-128-scientists-and-academics-urge-governor-newsom-carb-to-fix-flawed-scoping-plan/>

II. DERs are a Cost-Effective Solution.

DERs can achieve several environmental and community benefits, such as local economic benefits including job creation, improvements to public health including decreased air and groundwater pollution, resiliency, affordability, and as detailed above, avoided significant land use, biodiversity, and species impacts. For instance, growing local solar and storage would save California ratepayers \$4 billion a year, adding up to \$120 billion over the next 30 years.⁸

It is important to build upon the OIIP's reference to non-energy benefits ("NEBs"), and coordinate with the IEPR to integrate NEBs into cost-effective analyses, especially in regards to the myriad of benefits DERs may offer DAC residents. Meaningful and funded community engagement and partnerships can help identify these benefits. Coordination with the IEPR is also relevant because these local benefits should drive IEPR policy recommendations. This OIIP presents an opportunity to not only identify challenges and barriers to DER deployment by DACs, but also propose solutions to eliminating these barriers.

III. The CEC and CPUC Should Develop a High DER Future "From the Ground Up."

Climate change legislation indicates the immediate and absolutely urgent need for reducing reliance on fossil fuels, maximizing energy efficiency, producing renewable energy and conserving our natural resources. Together, these strategies advance environmental stewardship at the state, regional, and municipal levels. *However, no real planning is occurring or emerging at the neighborhood level to ensure that neighborhoods enter the green economy as economic partners engaged in the production of renewable energy and as environmental stewards - not just as dependent consumers of energy in constant need of financial assistance from utility companies.* The practice of environmental justice must prioritize neighborhood-focused energy planning - energy use, technology that allows for local energy production and distribution, and environmental stewardship are essential parts of today's urban planning process. Comprehensive neighborhood-focused energy plans are needed to ensure that disadvantaged neighborhoods are included as equal partners in the region's green economy.⁹

At the workshop, CPUC Staff comments regarding the undersubscription of programs intended to benefit DACs illustrates the urgency of identifying community "economic partners" as noted above. Echoing panelist comments at the workshop to begin to cure this deficiency, the CEC and CPUC must first identify community needs, or said another way, identify and adequately consider the associated NEBs that DERs can offer DAC residents, and then design a

⁸ Vibrant Clean Energy, Role of Distributed Generation in Decarbonizing California by 2045 (July 2021) at 6 available at https://www.vibrantcleanenergy.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/VCE-CCSA_CA_Report.pdf.

⁹ Race & Place in Sacramento, Sept 2021, A report for the City of Sacramento to support preparation of the Environmental Justice Element of the Sacramento 2040 General Plan Update at 140 (emphasis added), available at https://www.cityofsacramento.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/CDD/Planning/General-Plan/2040-General-Plan/Race_Place_Nov-2021.pdf?la=en

distribution system that can meet these needs. To do so, however, requires a community engagement effort different from current efforts; one geared towards identifying and partnering with entities to assist or even lead in the buildout of DERs in DACs. The Center recommends that the CEC and CPUC meaningfully collaborate with a trusted community-based organization(s) to develop a community engagement plan to further this effort. This community engagement plan should include a funding mechanism to maintain long-term partnerships and the identification of entities to further the deployment of DERs. Achieving the high DER future in this way “from the ground up” will ensure that DAC residents are not left behind as the state moves closer to achieving the SB 100 target.

Sincerely,

/s/

Roger Lin
Senior Attorney, Energy Justice Program