

Western Water Strategies

Felicia Marcus, Chair
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814



July 14, 2014

Re: **Emergency Water Conservation Regulations**

I am writing to offer recommendations regarding the State Board's proposed emergency urban water conservation regulations. I'd like to thank the Board for taking this important and nearly unprecedented step forward. The draft regulations include appropriate guidance to water agencies and the public. Additional guidance is included in the newly-posted resolution by which the Board will adopt emergency regulations. The following recommendations are intended to strengthen both the regulations and the resolution.

The Governor's California Water Action Plan highlights the need to "make water conservation a California way of life." The Board should craft its regulations and resolution with this guidance in mind.

California has made dramatic progress in promoting water use efficiency over the past several decades. Much of that progress has come from improved codes and standards, as well as retrofit programs that have placed more efficient fixtures and appliances in California homes and businesses. These programs, however, do not require the changes in behavior that are clearly required to integrate water conservation into California's "way of life." Moving forward, behavior change will become increasingly important to secure the dramatic additional savings that have been shown by multiple analyses by state agencies, NGOs and water agencies.

The reason the Board is considering emergency regulations is that California has made inadequate progress in responding to the Governor's call for a voluntary 20 percent reduction in water use. In this context, it is relevant that a USC/LA Times poll completed in May found that only 16 percent of Californians said that the drought has had a "major impact on their daily lives."¹

The Governor's California Water Action Plan and the USC/LA Times poll suggest that the Board should include provisions in its regulations and resolution designed to encourage ambitious and strategically

¹ Greenberg Guinand Rosner Research. Poll conducted for the University of California Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences and the Los Angeles Times, May 31, 2014. <http://gqrr.com/articles/2014/05/31/new-university-of-southern-california-dornsife-college-of-letters-arts-and-sciences-los-angeles-times-poll-10/>

designed public outreach and engagement programs that are designed to encourage Californians to change their behavior regarding water use.

For years, California water agencies have implemented public education programs. I encourage the Board to direct agencies to move beyond these traditional programs and to develop and implement a new generation of programs designed to help Californians change their behavior. In particular, California water agencies have many new tools available to them to design and implement these new programs.

In light of the need discussed above, I recommend that the Board amend its resolution to include the following:

- Direct retail water agencies to adopt behavioral water efficiency programs designed to increase customer awareness of their water use and how that use compares with their neighbors. (Please see a letter from WaterSmart Software to the Board, dated June 26.)
- Direct water suppliers to encourage the development and adoption of new technology-based water conservation solutions, particularly those that would encourage behavior change.
- Direct water suppliers to collaborate with state agencies, NGOs and others in the development of a far more ambitious and comprehensive state-wide public education and engagement strategy focused on behavior change.

The second recommendation above is intended to promote the development of a new generation of high-tech water solutions, similar to the work the technology community has undertaken over the past 20 years to develop new energy efficiency and renewable energy tools. The drought represents an important opportunity to encourage the entrepreneurs and innovative spirit that California is so well known for to build a new high-tech water industry. Such an industry would have benefits far beyond the drought, including job creation and establishing California as a world leader in an emerging field. The Board has an important opportunity to encourage the creation of new technology-based solutions.

The final recommendation above is intended to promote the creation of a strategically designed public engagement effort that takes advantage of new media, new information technology and new scientific understanding (in fields such as behavioral economics) of the most effective strategies to encourage behavior change. These tools can facilitate the development of a comprehensive approach that extends far beyond traditional media.

The Governor's call to integrate conservation into California's way of life is not the first time the State has launched a program designed to change behavior. In fields such as the use of seat belts, promoting recycling and reducing littering, the state has implemented ambitious programs to encourage behavior changes that benefit the state, as well as individual Californians. Perhaps the most striking example of

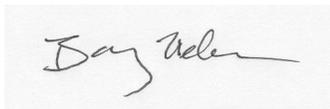
such a campaign is the state's highly respected anti-smoking effort. That campaign took a modest "feel good" anti-smoking effort and transformed it into an ambitious, high-profile program designed to achieve real results. And, in fact, this campaign has played an important part in a remarkable transformation in the behavior of Californians regarding smoking, since the program was launched in 1990. Surely the drought should prompt a similar effort in the water arena.

Such an ambitious new, 21st Century water conservation education and engagement effort should not be confined to traditional media, it should include new media outlets, new scientific results, information technology and more. Such an effort would help set the stage for other water agency efforts, such as behavioral water efficiency programs and new rate structures designed both to encourage water conservation and protect agency financial integrity.

If we are to achieve the Governor's goal of integrating water conservation into the daily lives of Californians, we must build new tools to promote behavior change. Such a program would be directly responsive to the challenges posed by the drought. It would also help advance the Governor's Water Action Plan in many areas, moving toward a more reliable water supply for the state's economy and environment.

Thank you for considering these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barry Nelson", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Barry Nelson
Principal

