



SAN JOAQUIN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

MEETING TODAY'S CHALLENGES / PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

May 27, 2016

Ms. Jeanie Townsend, Clerk to the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Floor (95814)
P.O. Box 100
Sacramento, CA 95812
commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov



RE: Comments to A-2239 (a)-(c)

Dear Chair Marcus and Members of the Board:

The San Joaquin Farm Bureau is a private, not for profit organization that has been dedicated to the advocacy for the agriculture industry in San Joaquin County for over one hundred years. We are commenting on the draft revised order for the East San Joaquin Coalition because the precedential nature of the order will have statewide implications, including impacts to our coalition area as well as impacting our members who farm in both regions.

I. Any determination about the current program's ability to protect groundwater is premature.

We are very concerned that the current coalition- centric approach to synthesizing data and working directly with growers to implement management plans is being considered to be ineffective before it is even entirely implemented. Growers in the high vulnerability areas in the East San Joaquin area have only been reporting their summaries for a year, and the San Joaquin and Delta region has just begun this process. Due to the nature of groundwater, it will take time to notice trends in improvement in the water quality.

It is out of the realm of possibility that the current WDR could be considered to be not protective of groundwater when it has yet to be entirely implemented according to the timeline that the CVWB prescribed to the coalition.

II. The Management Practices Evaluation Program has proven to be effective.

Furthermore, the Board is considering a purely quantitative approach that is overly prescriptive. A normal A/R ratio will vary from field to field depending on soil type and almost 20 variables and there is no way to determine whether or not that ratio is protective of water quality without also accounting for the unique characteristics of each individual field.

The management practices evaluation program that is currently being utilized to address surface water quality should be the approach that coalitions are given the flexibility to use for groundwater because they are successful, site specific, and narrowly applied in a manner that it is not overly burdensome. In the San Joaquin County and Delta area, there were 20 management plans that were successfully completed in 2015. For a management plan to be considered complete, there must be a management practice that is implemented by a grower that results in having no exceedances at the testing site for three years. The management plans are a process; the coalition works with the CVWB to develop and approve the plan, and then the coalition works with the grower on the implementation of the plan along with the extensive water quality monitoring.

This approach works best because it enhances the development of new and innovative management practices that are included in the educational workshops that the coalition provides for their members. Most importantly, the development of the management practices that are then implemented on fields and farms have had led to actual, tangible benefits to water quality.

We see no reason why this would be any less effective for groundwater and we caution the SWRCB that by approving the revised order, the finite resources that coalitions need to develop and implement the management plans that have had proven benefits to water quality will be compromised for the sake of creating shelf decorations at the CVWB office.

III. Monitoring domestic wells falls outside the scope of the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program

Monitoring drinking water is a function of the SWRCB's drinking water program, not the irrigated lands regulatory program. Including in the revised order is the mandate that growers will now have to test every well on their property twice the first year, and every year after if the well is within 2 mg/L of the drinking water standard. This excessive monitoring and testing will be incredibly costly as most growers have more than one well and testing can run in the thousands of dollars for each well.

The networks of wells that are selected for groundwater quality monitoring programs are very well thought out in terms of including a cross section of wells that is comprehensive enough to be effectively used for monitoring water quality and trends, but select enough so that data is useable and the monitoring is not too onerous or too costly.

Implementing the new order with this requirement is going to be a significant expense for growers. Coalitions, including the San Joaquin County and Delta Water Quality Coalition, are unwilling to include the bi-annual testing of every single well into their groundwater quality monitoring program which means the cost of the testing the first year, and any subsequent tests that are needed will be shouldered entirely by the individual grower.

Such monitoring and reporting is redundant. Small drinking water systems are regularly monitored by the county Environmental Health Departments. With so many different sets of data already available, it does make sense to add another set of information to the mix. In fact, more focused monitoring, like that in a groundwater quality control plan is more effective because it makes trends more apparent and it is easier to see areas where management plans may need to be implemented. Instead, the revised order simply creates more paperwork that will need to be sifted through and synthesized rather than using funding and staff expertise where they could be best utilized, addressing water quality issues for communities in need.

IV. Field level information should only be reported to the coalitions.

We reject proponents' arguments that more information is better. Instead, we need to focus our resources on better information. Forcing growers to send all nitrogen management plans and summaries to the CVWB, regardless of vulnerability is going to result in nothing more than a paper pushing exercise. By the time those plans and summaries can even be evaluated, and then evaluated in the context of crop, soil type, and depth to groundwater- coalitions could already be working

with growers to implement management plans in specific areas that will improve water quality more quickly.

Agriculture is no stranger to regulation and the community is all too familiar with the fact that along with unfunded regulatory mandates come steeply increased fees to the regulated community. The CVWB has estimated that they will need roughly 75 new staff to sift through all of the plans and reports, which means it will fall to the regulated community to fund those positions. When San Joaquin County and Delta Water Quality Coalition began, the coalition paid the SWRCB roughly \$.12 an acre for the administration of the program, now growers pay \$5.00 an acre to the coalition, with \$.80 an acre being for the administration of the program by the regulators.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the revised Waste Discharge Requirement order for the East San Joaquin area and respectfully ask that the Board not adopt the order as it is drafted. This order is a large step back for water quality improvements and will come at a huge expense to growers. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the San Joaquin Farm Bureau Federation at (209) 931-4931.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrew Watkins".

President