



Dr. Allan Bernstein,
Chairman, OC WISE

December 1, 2015

Robert Sulnick,
Executive Director, OC WISE

Via email to: commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov

Association of California Cities -
Orange County

Huntington Beach
Chamber of Commerce

LA-OC Building and
Construction Trades Council

Orange County Association
of Realtors

Poseidon Water

South Orange County
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Young Democrats

Millennials for New Water

Ms. Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th floor
Sacramento, CA 95814 3

Re: Comment Letter – Urban Water Conservation Workshop

Dear Ms. Townsend:

Orange County Water Independence, Sustainability & Efficiency (“OC WISE”) is a coalition of local governments, business, labor, Young Democrats, university students and community groups united behind the principles of efficient water use and water supply independence for Orange County. OC WISE supports the developmental of all forms of new water for the County. We believe that Orange County is a model for water resource management and provides a case study for the State Water Resources Control Board (“SWRCB”) as it considers how best to address the impacts of cyclical drought, climate change and population growth on the state’s fragile water supply infrastructure.

In the event state-wide water Emergency Regulations continue, OC WISE believes they should be modified to acknowledge and give credit to water agencies that, like the Orange County Water District (OCWD), have invested in local, drought- proof water supplies that promote water independence. Given the extreme drought conditions crippling the state over the past five years, OC WISE supported Governor Brown’s drought emergency declarations and the regulations enacted by the SWRCB for statewide urban water conservation. The statewide conservation mandate was a necessary stop-gap measure at the time. However, as currently implemented the Emergency Regulations are incongruent with the broader policy goals and objectives established in Governor Brown’s 2014 Water Action Plan, specifically Action #2 which calls for increased regional self-reliance and integrated management across all levels of government. Governor Brown’s Executive Order issued on November 13, 2015 acknowledged this unintended conflict and directed that *“The Water Board shall consider modifying its existing restrictions to address uses of potable and non-potable water, as well as to incorporate insights gained from existing restrictions.”*

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Should the Emergency Regulations continue, OC WISE believes it is essential they be modified to acknowledge and give credit to those water agencies , that have invested in local, drought-sustainable water supplies (i.e. potable reuse and desalination supplies) that enhance water supply reliability and reduce demand on environmentally constrained sources like the Sacramento San Joaquin Bay Delta (“Delta”). These drought sustainable supplies should be allowed a credit from a retail water agencies conservation reduction target thereby adjusting its conservation standard.

Governor Brown’s 2014 Water Action Plan

Governor Brown’s Plan includes Action #2 - INCREASE REGIONAL SELF-RELIANCE AND INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT. The description of Action #2 states that *“ensuring water security at the local level includes efforts to conserve and use water more efficiently, to protect or create habitat for local species, to recycle water for reuse, to capture and treat stormwater for reuse, and to remove salts and contaminants from brackish or contaminated water or from seawater.”* Governor Brown’s Water Action Plan goes on to state that *“the administration will review and propose measures to streamline permitting for local projects that make better use of local water supplies such as recycling, stormwater capture, and desalination of brackish and seawater.”*

Orange County’s Local Water Supply Initiatives

Orange County water agencies have already invested hundreds of millions of dollars in local drought sustainable water supplies in order to establish regional water supply self-reliance. Without those supplies the current conditions would be much more severe. Moving forward, the implementation of the goals, objectives and actions found in the Governor’s Water Action Plan will be critical to the state’s ability to overcome cyclical drought and prepare for climate change. The steps outlined in the Governor’s plan are exactly the initiatives Orange County has undertaken for the past decade.

Orange County has the benefit of a large groundwater basin. In 1933 the Orange County Water District (“District”) was formed by a special act of the California State Legislature to protect Orange County’s rights to water in the Santa Ana River, which provides the main source of water for the County’s groundwater basin. The District manages the groundwater basin that provides reliable, high quality groundwater to 19 municipal and special water districts that serve 2.4 million customers in north and central Orange County. However,

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the groundwater basin does not serve South Orange County, and as a result the county as a whole must import approximately 50% of its water supply for 3.1 million residents.

Since 2008, the District has operated the Groundwater Replenishment System (“GWRS”) – the world’s largest water purification system for indirect potable reuse. After initially producing 70 million gallons of high-quality water every day, GWRS today can produce up to 103,000 acre feet (AF) and plans are in the works for a final expansion to 130,000 acre feet. Orange County has also been a leader when it comes to water conservation, and urban suppliers throughout the County are meeting the SWRCB’s conservation mandates targets. In fact, Orange County’s water consumption is lower today than it was in 1989, notwithstanding an over 20% increase in population since that period of time.

Water recycling and conservation are essential, but alone they are insufficient to meet current demand within Orange County. The region’s significant investment in these innovative water management strategies, coupled with the District’s ongoing management of the groundwater basin, only provides for about 50% of the current water demand within the County during normal rainfall years, less during drought conditions.

In May 2015, the District’s Board of Directors voted to approve a Water Reliability Agreement Term Sheet for the purchase of 50 million gallons per day (56,000 acre feet per year) of drinking water from the proposed Huntington Beach Desalination Project. A smaller desalination plant is also planned in South Orange County at Doheny Beach. Water from the Huntington Beach Desalination Project coupled with the final expansion of GWRS alone will provide Orange County with an additional 87,000 acre-feet per year of drought-sustainable water. These new sources of sustainable water supply would reduce the region’s dependence on imported water sources from Northern California and the Colorado River that are vulnerable to drought, climate change, natural disasters and regulatory restrictions.

In closing, we hope the State Water Board will carefully consider the investments currently made and planned for the future by Orange County. OC WISE is advocating that should the Emergency Regulations continue that they be modified to acknowledge and give credit to water agencies that have invested in local, drought-sustainable water supplies that enhance water supply self-reliance.

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Sincerely,

Robert H. Sulnick
Executive Director
OCWISE

CC: Felicia Marcus, Chair, State Water Resources Control Board
Frances Spivy-Weber, Vice Chair
Tam Doduc, State Water Resources Control Board Member
Dorene D'Adamo, State Water Resources Control Board Member
Steven Moore, State Water Resources Control Board Member
Kathy Frevert, Staff, State Water Resources Control Board

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