

## **Making Water Conservation a California Way of Life**

### **Summary of Proposed Legislation**

In the 2014 California Water Action Plan, the Administration proposed ten broad actions to make California's water system more resilient to extreme weather cycles like the historic drought that is just ending. One of the ten actions is making water conservation a California way of life.

Last May, Governor Brown signed Executive Order B-37-16, which directed state agencies to develop a new approach to long-term water conservation that will make the state more resilient to future droughts. Today state agencies released a plan to make water conservation a way of life, including proposed legislation summarized below:

#### Water Conservation Standards and Use Reporting

The proposal establishes authorities and deadlines for setting new long-term standards for efficient urban water use. Specifically, the proposal:

- Requires the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board), in consultation with the Department of Water Resources (Department) to set long-term urban water use efficiency standards by May 20, 2021;
- Allows the State Water Board to set interim standards to ensure that progress begins before the long-term standards are adopted in 2021;
- Includes a robust public participation process to provide the State Water Board and Department with critical input from local agencies, tribal governments, non-governmental organizations, the business sector, academics, and others.

Key to the Executive Order is a requirement that the state's 409 urban water suppliers meet new water use targets. Rather than measuring water savings as a percentage reduction from a chosen baseline, the new standards recognize past investments by water suppliers in advancing conservation, and take into account the unique climatic, demographic and land use characteristics of each urban water agency's service area. The approach allows regions to develop an approach best suited for their community.

The proposal also authorizes the Board and local agencies to enforce the standards in the same manner that they have been able to enforce the Board's emergency conservation regulations during the drought. It also authorizes the Board to set emergency conservation regulations for one year instead of the current 270 days. This change will allow the Board to make future conservation determinations at the end of the winter when water conditions are known.

#### Urban Water Shortage Contingency Planning

Under current law, urban water suppliers must include a water shortage contingency analysis as a component of their Urban Water Management Plan submitted to the Department of Water Resources, which must be updated every five years. Water shortage contingency planning is important because it can affect the basic health and safety of California residents. It can be costly for both the state and local communities to engage in last-minute, emergency efforts to alleviate water supply crises when they happen. Urban water suppliers should thoroughly evaluate the potential impacts on their water supplies of different water shortage scenarios. It is critical that water suppliers inform their customers of the risks and potential consequences of their plans.

Current planning efforts are not consistent across water agencies. Some urban water suppliers do a good job planning and others were unprepared to respond effectively to the supply shortages during the recent drought. Suppliers with adequate water shortage planning and well-defined contingency actions showed high levels of resiliency during the drought.

The proposed legislation will strengthen local drought resilience through improved planning and annual assessments. In addition, the proposed planning and assessment methods will allow local officials and their customers to understand the risks of water supply shortages from longer and more severe droughts and will improve the information sent to both customers and the state during drought conditions. Better planning and information will make communities more resilient and will reduce costs and impacts on customers in the wake of more frequent and severe drought conditions under climate change.

Additionally, urban water suppliers will be required to submit a Water Shortage Contingency Plan and conduct a Drought Risk Assessment every five years, and submit a water budget forecast annually.

#### Agricultural Water Management Planning (AWMP)

Currently, agricultural water suppliers that provide water to more than 25,000 irrigated acres are required to (1) adopt and submit an Agricultural Water Management Plan to the Department, and (2) implement efficient water management practices including the measurement and volumetric pricing of water deliveries. Initial reports were due in 2012 and, beginning in 2015, Ag Water Management Plans must be updated every five years.

Additionally, agricultural water suppliers that provide water to 10,000 and up to 25,000 irrigated acres are currently not required to prepare and submit plans unless state funds are available to support the planning efforts. Current law also permits water suppliers that are contractors under the Reclamation Reform Act or Central Valley Project Improvement Act requirements to submit their federal plans in lieu of a plan meeting the criteria established in SB X7-7 (Chapter 4, Statutes of 2009).

Under the proposed legislation, agricultural water suppliers will be required to:

- Develop an annual water budget for the agricultural water service area;
- Identify agricultural water management objectives and implementation plans;
- Quantify measures to increase water use efficiency, and
- Develop an adequate drought plan for periods of limited supply.

The proposal will expand existing requirements to require agricultural water suppliers providing water to over 10,000 irrigated acres of land to prepare, adopt, and submit plans by April 1, 2021, and every five years thereafter. These plans will be reviewed by the Department, and compliance issues will be referred to the State Water Board.