



# COACHELLA VALLEY WATER DISTRICT

*Established in 1918 as a public agency*

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June 4, 2024

The Honorable Dave Min  
Chair, Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Water  
1021 O Street, Room 6710  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 2079 (Bennett) – Oppose Unless Amended**

Dear Senator Min:

The Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) respectfully opposes AB 2079 (Bennett) unless it is amended to exempt Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) with approved alternative plans. AB 2079 would regulate the permitting of new, large-diameter, high-capacity wells for all basins identified in Department of Water Resources Bulletin 118, which is an inventory of groundwater basins in California.

We request that GSAs with approved alternative plans be removed from this legislation as the plans were intended to recognize that local agencies have been addressing groundwater issues in their basins for many years and in many cases are already sustainable.

Established in 1918, CVWD was formed with the core mission of safeguarding and preserving water resources, primarily for agricultural irrigation purposes. Over the years, CVWD has evolved into a multifaceted agency serving a vast area of approximately 1,000 square miles, stretching from the San Geronio Pass to the Salton Sea, predominantly within Riverside County but also including portions of Imperial and San Diego counties. For over 100 years, we have been, and continue to be, exceptional stewards of our groundwater supplies by responsibly managing our water resources for future generations.

**CVWD opposes AB 2079 because:**

- It is a one-size-fits-all approach to groundwater management that represents an unnecessary intrusion into local control, interferes with the regulatory authority granted to GSAs under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), and adds burdensome requirements on GSAs;
- This bill will negatively impact agricultural production with the potential to harm state and local economies; and
- It will have the unintended consequence of incentivizing unpermitted wells.

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SGMA was passed in 2014 and established a framework for sustainable groundwater management that recognized the need for local control and solutions tailored to local conditions. AB 2079 proposes a one-size-fits-all approach that is unnecessary for GSAs with an approved alternative plan. These plans have been in place for many years and, in the case of CVWD, have already resulted in sustainable management and increases in water levels throughout both subbasins managed by CVWD and partner GSAs. Coachella Valley GSAs already work closely with our local enforcement agencies and have programs in place to review proposed new wells and we have required metering for many years.

AB 2079 fails to consider that the geology of basins varies across the state. Locally, it is common to have wells within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of each other because the basin's depth and yield characteristics do not result in well interference. The Coachella Valley has no history of wells going dry. SGMA allows GSAs to develop local approaches and metrics of sustainability while this bill imposes a one-size-fits-all approach which is not based on transparent data. In the case of the Coachella Valley, the need for this bill is not substantiated by local geology or groundwater conditions. This is counter to the Department of Water Resources' position and the ethos of SGMA which requires that we "show our work" when proposing groundwater management approaches in Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) or alternatives.

Furthermore, the bill defines a large capacity well as a "large-diameter, high-capacity well" with a diameter of more than eight inches and intended to produce greater than two acre-feet annually. This is counter to local State Water Code provisions (25 acre-feet annually for CVWD) that were developed to support replenishment programs, metering and reporting of groundwater production, and collection of fees to fund these programs, which have contributed to local sustainability and significant increases in water levels and storage throughout the Indio and Mission Creek Subbasins.

AB 2079 is a vast overreach that will have the unintended consequence of disrupting agricultural operations within the CVWD service area and across the state. CVWD provides Colorado River water via the Coachella Canal to more than 65,000 acres of agricultural lands in the Eastern Coachella Valley. Colorado River water is the primary water source for agricultural irrigation; however, customers are required to have backup wells in the event the Coachella Canal is unable to convey water due to maintenance or other factors. The Eastern Coachella Valley has a mix of both agriculture and a sizeable residential population in close proximity to farms. Under the proposed legislation, new wells within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of a well that provides drinking water to one or more people would be prohibited, even though in our basin this well spacing has not resulted in any adverse impacts to any groundwater users including private domestic and small water system wells.

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We are also concerned AB 2079 may have the unintended consequence of incentivizing people to drill unpermitted wells if the constraints of receiving a permit are too burdensome. Creating such an administratively burdensome framework to groundwater management could undermine the positive work being performed across the state by local groundwater sustainability agencies. This would have negative financial effects for CVWD since private wells are metered and pay replenishment charges that are used to purchase water to recharge.

For these reasons, CVWD respectfully opposes AB 2079 unless it is amended to exclude GSAs with an approved alternative plan. Unless amended, we request a "NO" vote when AB 2079 is heard in the Natural Resources and Water Committee.

Sincerely,



J. M. Barrett  
General Manager

cc: The Honorable Kelly Seyarto, Vice Chair Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee  
Members and Staff of the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee  
The Honorable Steve Bennett, Author