



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Landmark Water Bill Moves Forward

**Sacramento, CA (April 27, 2017)** – Legislation restoring fairness to water rights holders across California is one step closer to becoming law. Assembly Bill 313, a major reform introduced by Assemblyman Adam Gray (D-Merced) passed through its first committee on Tuesday. The Assembly Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife voted 13-0 (with two abstentions) to send AB 313 onto the next step. Byron-Bethany Irrigation District (BBID) provided technical support in crafting the bill, which provides fixes to California’s broken water management system.

“On behalf of the District, I commend Assemblyman Gray for showing the visionary leadership to tackle this critical issue that impacts communities across the state,” said BBID Board President Russell Kagehiro. “As BBID itself has experienced, state agencies wield unchecked power that prevents all water rights holders from being treated fairly.”

AB 313 proposes to restructure water rights hearings, creating a new Water Rights Division in the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) currently exercises quasi-judicial authority to hold water rights hearings. The SWRCB writes regulations, initiates enforcement actions, and conducts hearings in which the Board staff act as prosecutors and the SWRCB itself acts as the judge and jury. At Tuesday’s Committee hearing, BBID GM Rick Gilmore provided testimony in strong support.

“The current system inappropriately grants blanket power over water rights to the State Water Board, and creates inherent biases that make impartiality an impossibility,” Gilmore said. “We need neutral parties to intervene in these complicated matters to ensure fairness above all else.”

Administrative law judges would preside over water rights matters in the legislation’s newly-created Water Rights Division. The Division would conduct hearings and make recommendations to the Executive Director of the SWRCB that the Executive Director could accept, reject, or modify. The new structure ensures objectivity, while still providing state water agency experts the forum to give input.

AB 313 was amended from its original form, which initially included more sweeping reforms to California’s water management structure. After Tuesday’s vote, the latest, streamlined version now moves to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, which will consider the bill in the coming weeks.

“AB 313 isn’t a fix-all for what ails California water management,” Gilmore said, “but thanks to Assemblyman Gray, it’s a significant step in the right direction.”

*Byron-Bethany Irrigation District (BBID) is a multi-county special district serving parts of Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Joaquin Counties across 47 square miles and 30,000 acres. The district serves 160 agricultural customers and approximately 12,000 residents of the Mountain House community. For additional media information, contact Nick Janes at 630.915.6493, or via email at [n.janes@bbid.org](mailto:n.janes@bbid.org).*

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