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Governor rejects water rights bill



Press staff report | Posted 15 hours ago

Gov. Jerry Brown has vetoed a bill that a Tracy area irrigation district supported “to bring fairness and due process to California’s water-rights enforcement.”

Assembly Bill 313 was introduced by Assemblyman Adam Gray (D-Merced) and supported by Byron Bethany Irrigation District.

Rick Gilmore, BBID general manager, said the bill “would have restored some balance” to the water rights enforcement procedures of the state Water Resources Control Board.

“They (water board members and staff) act as the judge, jury and prosecutor of the water world with immense impunity and no accountability,” Gilmore declared. “When the scales are tipped, water users lose faith in the process.”

The bill called for an administrative law judge in a newly created Water Rights Division to preside over water rights hearings.

AB 313 received bipartisan support as it passed both the Assembly and Senate before going to the governor’s desk.

Despite the veto, Gray said he would keep working on the water board fairness issue.

Brown, in his veto message, also indicated the issue was not dead. He directed the secretary of the state’s Environmental Protection Agency to evaluate the potential role of administrative law judges and provide a recommendation for improving the water board’s hearing process.

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