

January 18, 2017

An Open Letter from Scientists Supporting Governor Brown's Vision to Make Water Conservation a California Way of Life

Dear Governor Brown,

We write to encourage you to continue to make conservation and efficiency a top priority for water management. California cities, farms, and ecosystems all compete for a limited water supply. During drought, the limits are sharply in focus. We agree with you that California needs to make conservation a way of life to make the best use of this important scarce resource. We have made dramatic progress in improved efficiency in all use sectors, including agricultural, residential, industrial, and commercial. This good work needs to be accelerated. There is much still to be done.

Business as usual is not an option; California simply does not have enough water to support our old ways. Since the Water Board was established a century ago, it has issued water rights that may amount to over five times the state's average annual supply. The Board has a tough task to realign expectations based on those rights with available wet water. We are on an unsustainable path. And as you know, in many areas of the San Joaquin Valley, groundwater levels are more than 100 feet below previous historic lows. Some basins are so overdrafted that we are seeing severe land subsidence. While some groundwater recharge occurs in wet years, it is more than offset by over-pumping in dry and even average years. Your leadership on groundwater management is a key step in the right direction.

Conservation and efficiency are also needed. California's sometimes inefficient use of water, coupled with the uncertainty and variability of a changing climate, poses a real threat to our communities, economy, and environment. We have an opportunity to lead the nation in smart water management. As your Executive Order recognizes, conservation and efficiency are key to creating a more resilient future for California. These no-regrets strategies also mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with energy used to pump, treat, and use water. Finally, maximizing conservation and developing accurate water demand forecasts can reduce the need for costly and energy-intensive infrastructure.

We urge the following common sense steps to increase the reliability of California's water supply:

- Prioritize water conservation and efficiency as the most cost-effective and energy-efficient options to meet our long-term needs;
- Invest in leak repair to reduce water lost during distribution;
- Improve data collection to help us understand and manage water use in all sectors;

- Develop more accurate water demand forecasts that reflect increased conservation and efficiency; and
- Set local targets that reflect local conditions and a changing climate.

We applaud your leadership with Executive Order B-37-16. The recently released report ‘Implementing Executive Order B-37-16, Making Water Conservation a California Way of Life in California’ shows that California is poised to make your vision a reality.

Sincerely,

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