

SB 23 (Caballero): Water Supply and Flood Risk Reduction Projects: Expedited Permitting SUPPORT



March 30, 2023

The Honorable Dave Min
Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee
1021 O Street, Room 3220
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 23 (Caballero): Water Supply and Flood Risk Reduction Projects: Expedited Permitting
Position: SUPPORT

Dear Senator Min:

On behalf of the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) and the undersigned organizations, we write to express our support for SB 23 (Caballero), which would streamline the permitting process of water supply and flood risk reduction projects while preserving established environmental protections. We believe this legislation is critical to ensuring that California's water infrastructure is modernized and made more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

California faces a range of water management challenges, including droughts, floods, and other natural disasters. While our weather patterns have always been variable, climate change has, and will continue to exacerbate the weather whiplash that is intensifying drought and precipitation events. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort between state and local agencies to construct and maintain water infrastructure projects needed in a 21st century climate. Unfortunately, the current permitting process for water infrastructure projects in California is complex and lengthy, and can be a significant barrier to progress in expanding and improving our water supply and flood risk reduction systems. This can result in delays, higher project costs, and uncertainty for communities, agricultural interests, and businesses that rely on a reliable and sustainable water supply. In addition, this can result in worse environmental outcomes, delaying projects that provide important benefits to aquatic and natural resources.

SB 23 would help address these issues by identifying opportunities to improve and streamline the regulatory permitting process, without shortcutting environmental reviews, so these critical infrastructure projects are built at the pace and scale needed to prepare for climate change. SB 23 would address inefficiencies in the application review process and ensure project proponents and state agencies are meeting reasonable deadlines and moving applications forward in an expeditious manner. The bill would utilize permit streamlining tools already available in existing law that are proven to reduce duplicative planning efforts while still meeting rigorous environmental standards. Finally, the bill would help address state agency resource and staffing issues by allowing project applicants to cover the costs of expediting the environmental review process.

SB 23 builds on recommendations in the Newsom Administration's "*California's Water Supply Strategy, Adapting to a Hotter, Drier Future*," released in August 2022. The Water Supply Strategy highlights that hotter and drier conditions caused by climate change could reduce California's water supplies in the coming decades. To continue to grow and thrive as a state, California will need to make up for a loss of supply by pursuing a wide range of infrastructure projects. An essential part of seeing these projects become reality, according to the Newsom Administration, is modernizing and

accelerating regulatory structures. SB 23 answers this call to action by providing a comprehensive set of ideas that address known sources of project delays. These solutions would advance projects that store more water above and below ground, capture water during high-flow events, improve conveyance, create access to drought-proof water supplies, and improve flood management—all of which are necessary to adapting to changing conditions.

From 2020 to 2022, California experienced the driest three-year period on record. In 2023, this prolonged drought was met with a series of atmospheric rivers and a bomb cyclone that brought significant amounts of rain and snow, leading to widespread flooding, property damage, and evacuation orders for tens of thousands of residents. The need for a generational investment in California’s water systems is evident, and over the last three years, state leaders have earmarked more than \$8 billion to modernize water infrastructure and management. Now action is needed to ensure these investments result in the timely delivery of critical projects. SB 23 is a critical step to providing California with modern, resilient, and sustainable water systems that will meet the needs of generations to come.

For these reasons, we are pleased to support SB 23 and respectfully request your “AYE” vote when the bill is heard in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee on April 11.

Sincerely,

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