

Attachment B

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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

July 11, 2023

The Honorable Tom Umberg, Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 6530
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 560 (Bennett): Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: groundwater adjudication
As amended 6/26/23 – SUPPORT
Set for hearing 7/11/23 – Senate Judiciary Committee**

Dear Senator Umberg:

On behalf of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, I write in support of AB 560 by Assembly Member Steve Bennett, which would require proposed groundwater adjudication settlements be forwarded to the State Water Resources Control Board for review in partnership with the Department of Water Resources. AB 560 also requires both agencies to comment on any effects the proposed settlement will have on small farmers and disadvantaged communities. This measure provides important transparency and equity in the groundwater adjudication process, especially for disadvantaged communities like the Cuyama Valley.

The Cuyama Valley is located at the intersection of four counties: Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Kern, and Ventura Counties in a remote high-desert valley about half-way between Santa Maria and Bakersfield. The entire Cuyama Valley is identified as a “disadvantaged community” by the Department of Water Resources. Further, the Cuyama Groundwater Basin is designated as one of 21 critically overdrafted high-priority basins by the Department and groundwater is the only source of water in the Cuyama Valley for all water uses. As a critically overdrafted basin, the Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) has been developing its Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) since 2017. The GSP was recently approved by DWR with several required corrective actions.

The two largest pumpers in the Cuyama Valley, Bolthouse Farms and Grimmway Farms, filed for adjudication in August 2021. Both entities also hold seats on the CBGSA. The CBGSA is not a party to the adjudication. Thus, the CBGSA and the adjudication are operating on parallel tracks causing great expense and confusion to local stakeholders.

The cost of adjudication can be extremely onerous, particularly financially, to the majority of these small farmers and *de minimis* water users. AB 560 offers important clarity to a lengthy and sometimes

confusing process. Further, it ensures that work done to develop a Groundwater Sustainability Plan in compliance with SGMA is considered during the adjudication process. Finally, we greatly appreciate the inclusion of consideration for small farmers and disadvantaged communities, as these stakeholders are least likely to be able to meaningfully engage in the adjudication process. For these reasons, the County of Santa Barbara supports AB 560 and respectfully requests your “aye” vote when it comes before your committee.

Sincerely,

Das Williams
Chair, Board of Supervisors

cc: Members and Consultants, Senate Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Steve Bennett, California State Assembly
County of Santa Barbara Legislative Delegation