

Legislative Highlights from 2017

By Heather Baez



While many statewide were focused on the larger, high-profile issues in the Legislature such as the 15-bill package to confront the state's housing crisis, the passage of the gas tax, and the extension of the Cap and Trade program, water agencies and stakeholders were busy focused on important issues facing our industry. Advancing the California WaterFix and EcoRestore project took center stage for MWDOC this year. Opponents of the project continue to throw roadblocks to slow

down or halt the project, and this year was no different. MWDOC actively opposed and helped kill four bills authored by Assembly Member Jim Frazier – AB 732, AB 791, AB 792 and AB 793. In addition, we attended and testified in favor of the project at two Delta Stewardship Council meetings where diversion points were discussed.

One of the more high profile issues within the water industry was the implementation of the Governor Brown's report, *Making Water Conservation a California Way of Life, Implementing Executive Order B-37-19*. Early in the Legislative session, the majority of water providers statewide, including MWDOC, rallied behind Assembly Member Blanca Rubio's bill package – AB 968 and AB 1654, plus AB 869 which was related to recycled water. Unfortunately, AB 968 and AB 1654 ultimately did not move forward and an alternative bill package, AB 1668 (Friedman) and SB 606 (Skinner/Hertzberg) were selected as the vehicles for implementation. During the Legislature's summer recess and up until the last day of the legislative session, MWDOC worked tirelessly on amendments that would be beneficial to Orange County, including a permanent 10% credit for potable reuse water. In a prior version, the credit was set to sunset in ten years. AB 1668 and SB 606 are still active, additional amendments are expected in early 2018.

Conservation wasn't the only item that took center stage in 2017. SB 623 (Monning) was amended late in the session to add a monthly fee to every retail water meter to be deposited in the "Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund." This fund is intended to provide safe, clean drinking water in parts of California where water systems are chronically failing to do so. The fund may pay for replacement water (such as bottled water), water testing, and planning, construction, operation, and maintenance costs for system improvements in these areas. While MWDOC fully supports safe, clean drinking water for all Californians, we are concerned that this proposal will not solve the problem. We were part of a small group of water agencies that took the lead in opposing SB 623 in 2017 and will be very active in promoting an alternative proposal for 2018. We recognize that this is an ongoing issue that requires a solution and are committed to working with our fellow water agencies statewide towards a resolution.