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Merced Residents, Growers Take Concerns to Sacramento

MERCED, CA - Nearly 20 Merced County residents and farmers traveled more than 100 miles by bus, and waited nearly nine hours, to testify before the state water board today.

They joined more than 50 others in Sacramento from neighboring irrigation districts and communities from the San Joaquin Valley.

At issue is a state water board proposal that would divert more water from Merced County to the San Francisco Bay Delta.

Among the most concerning impacts aside from a significant loss of vital surface water are the expected decreases in quality and quantity of the groundwater. The groundwater is shared by rural farmers and the cities of Atwater, Livingston and Merced, among other communities.

"The impacts of this proposal will ripple throughout our community, affecting our economy and our water supply for cities and farmers alike," said MID General Manager John Sweigard. "I want to personally commend and thank all from our community who took the time to be heard. I would like to also thank all those who sent hundreds of letters protesting the proposal to take our water."

Among those present were Livingston City Manager Jose Ramirez, Merced Farm Bureau President Jean Okuye, and numerous farmers. The farmers included Joe, Loren and Rick Scoto; Louie Bandoni; Ashley Bandoni; Jeff Marchini; Dan DeWees; Bill Bright; Kenny Miyamoto; Anthony Roggero; Ezio Sansoni and James Fagundes.

Resolutions and letters of support have also been provided by the cities of Atwater, Livingston and Merced; Merced County; the Greater Chamber of Merced; The Hispanic Chamber of Merced and many other individuals.

Merced's two state legislators, Senator Anthony Cannella and Assemblyman Adam Gray, also spoke out against the Water Board proposal. Rep. Jeff Denham sent an aide to testify on behalf of the Valley and circulated a letter of concern, which was signed by Rep. Jim Costa, who represents Merced County.

"This isn't about farmers verses fish. This decision will pit farmers against their neighbors and municipalities," said Amanda Carvajal, director of the Merced County Farm Bureau. "What's even more frustrating is that even though the scientific evidence doesn't add up, state and federal agencies continue to advocate for unimpaired flows upwards of 60 percent."

The public comment period will remain open until March 29. No decision was made at the hearing, the State Water Board is expected to take action on the proposal before the end of the year.

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