

# Jerry Brown signs groundwater legislation

David Siders, Sacramento Bee, 9-17-14

Gov. Jerry Brown signed legislation Tuesday enacting sweeping new regulations on groundwater pumping in California, making the state the last in the West to regulate the practice.

The groundwater package, which gained momentum at the Capitol amid the state's ongoing drought, was negotiated by Brown and lawmakers in late August, and the governor's signature was all but assured.

"This is a big deal," Brown said at a signing ceremony at the Capitol. "It's been known about for decades that underground water has to be managed and regulated in some way."

The three-bill package signed by Brown will create local agencies to oversee groundwater extraction, a turn from the state's historic practice of allowing landowners in most cases to extract any water that lies beneath their land.

Proponents cited concerns about increased well drilling during the drought, with declining water levels underground. The legislation will require local agencies to guard against overdrafts.

The legislation was opposed by farm groups and Central Valley lawmakers. Critics said the regulations will hurt farmers already strained by sharp reductions in available surface water. They also objected to the creation of more bureaucracy and raised concerns about property rights.

"It is unfortunate that the governor felt compelled to sign this groundwater management scheme that was hastily cobbled together without regard to historical legal precedent and private property water rights," state Sen. Jim Nielsen, R-Gerber, said in [a prepared statement](#). "Californians who rely on groundwater will now have to deal with not only new and unaccountable government agencies that will police water usage; they will be at the mercy of these faceless bureaucrats who will impose unknown fees and fines."

Groundwater makes up about 40 percent of all fresh water consumed in California in average years, and far more in drought years.

Brown said public attention on the drought focused the Legislature on water. He called the drought the "overarching context that allows a lot of action that has taken place in Sacramento."

Brown said the legislation he signed Tuesday will put in place a "framework that has been resisted for a long, long time, since before my father was even governor."

Brown is seeking a historic fourth term, and he joked Monday that while the state is making progress, "Luckily, we won't achieve everything today, so you'll probably need me around for another four years."