

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5298

As Passed Senate, March 4, 2015

Title: An act relating to the diversion of certain municipal waters.

Brief Description: Concerning the diversion of certain municipal waters.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development (originally sponsored by Senators Ericksen, Hatfield, Honeyford and Warnick).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development: 1/27/15, 2/17/15 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 3/04/15, 34-13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5298 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Warnick, Chair; Dassel, Vice Chair; Hatfield, Ranking Minority Member; Hobbs and Honeyford.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: Water may be produced by means separate and apart from the natural cycle of rain, surface water, and groundwater in any drainage. This water is foreign to the drainage, that is from elsewhere. As an example, industrial plants dehydrate natural products such as vegetables, fruits, or milk, and extract the water from within the natural product thereby producing water that has never been part of the natural water cycle of the drainage in which the dehydrating plant is located.

This being the case, this created, foreign, or extracted water does not fit neatly within existing water law that operates on surface water and groundwater. It is not part and parcel of existing water codes. A line of Washington case law from the the early 1900s, with several cases in the 1920s, and apparently suspended in the late 1980s held in principle that water brought into a watershed from outside of it belonged to the person who brought it. If abandoned by that person, the water belonged to the first person to put that foreign water to beneficial use. However, this was not a perpetual right of beneficial use of water that may or

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may not be brought again into the watershed by the work of an outside agent. There is no right to this water derived from its prescriptive beneficial use. This water is not subject to the permitting system that applies to the natural water in a drainage, including not being available to a senior appropriator of water within the drainage.

The water available to municipal water systems for sale to its customers is derived from a water right like any other water put to beneficial use.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The act applies statewide.

Uninterruptible water supplies for municipal water suppliers are declared to be an overriding consideration of the public interest when all requirements are met, as follows:

- the quantity of foreign water is equal to or greater than the quantity of water diverted by the municipal supplier, and the point of introduction of the foreign water is within one mile of the point of diversion;
- the instantaneous diversion is no more than 0.1 percent of the minimum instream flow;
- the total volume diverted and the total volume of foreign water introduced are measured and reported to the Department of Ecology (Ecology) at least four times per year; and
- the introduction of foreign water complies with all water quality regulations for receiving water and with all federal, state, and local permitting requirements.

Foreign water is defined.

Ecology's authority to determine that overriding considerations of the public interest have been met in approving withdrawals under the fundamentals of the Water Resources Act may not be construed to be limited by these provisions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: This is a simple bill that allows the city to meet its drinking water standards with cow water that amounts to distilled water. It also solves a nitrate problem that finds 2000 people drinking from nitrate-contaminated wells. Currently, if the outflow is below the outtake, there is a credit. The bill allows the credit if the outflow is within a short distance from the outtake. The city has been working with the Department of Ecology (Ecology) under a memorandum of understanding for the last ten years. That Ecology declares itself against the bill is a startling surprise. This stretch of the river is not spawning grounds or habitat; it is a fish highway. It is written so specifically, the bill can't be used anywhere else. It just makes it unnecessary to build a million-dollar pipeline to move the cow water output upstream.

CON: Calling this foreign water may not be accurate given that there are 30 dairies in the Lynden area. If the plant is shut down, then the city would lose water it would be relying on. The city should use the regulatory process to mitigate taking more than its annual water right. Tribes are the most senior water right and their right must be quantified before junior rights can be known. This bill would circumvent and undermine fundamental water law. It is only one of five possible solutions that Ecology has been working with the city on. An impairment of 0.03 percent is still a fundamental impairment of in-stream flows.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Erickson, prime sponsor; Mike Martin, Stephen Banham, city of Lynden; Gary Vis, Lynden Chamber of Commerce.

CON: Bruce Wishart, Center for Environmental Law and Policy, Sierra Club; David Christensen, Dept. of Ecology; Steve Robinson, Quinault and Lummi Nations.

Persons Signed in to Testify But Not Testifying: No one.