

3/8/2021

The Honorable Pam Marsh  
Chair, House Energy and Environment Committee  
Oregon House of Representatives

**Re: Support HB 2241 – Water Quality Permitting**

Dear Chair Marsh and Members of the House Energy and Environment Committee:

We would like to respectfully urge your support for House Bill 2241, which will help the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) review and process water quality permit applications and issue water quality permits. A broad and diverse range of Oregon businesses, farmers, irrigation districts, and municipalities benefit from an efficient permitting process at DEQ, and this bill will give the agency a critical tool to alleviate regulatory congestion.

According to DEQ, roughly 73 percent of pending water quality permit applications are at least five years overdue. This regulatory roadblock results in delays in construction of certain projects as well a prolonged waiting period for water users to be able to access the water. With an increased workload and limited resources, DEQ unfortunately does not have the capacity or resources to overcome the backlog.

HB 2241 would establish a process for DEQ to hire third-party consultants who would shoulder the burden of reviewing pending water quality permit applications. These consultants, paid for by applicants, would act under strict guidelines set by DEQ in order to ensure that the application meets the high standards of the agency. Once review of the permit application is complete, the consultants would present a report to DEQ that includes a recommendation as to whether or not the permit should be approved. Approval of the application will continue to rest within the sole discretion of the agency.

This process would not infringe on the integrity of the agency's diligent review system, nor would it degrade or bypass the State's water quality standards. It is important that we maintain a high threshold for safety and environmental quality in Oregon, and this bill ensures continuity while still creating new efficiencies in the system.

For businesses waiting on permit approval to complete construction, employees waiting for the job to begin, or water users waiting to utilize a clean and precious resource, every day delayed makes a significant difference. We believe this solution introduces a practical and efficient way to resolve a very pressing issue for the state. We appreciate your support of HB 2241 and the improvements to our regulatory process that it will create.

Thank you for your consideration.

