

SUBJECT: Disposal of desalination waste streams into oil and gas injection wells

COMMITTEE: Natural Resources — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 10 ayes — Keffer, Ashby, D. Bonnen, Burns, Kacal, T. King, Larson,
Lucio, Nevárez, Workman

0 nays

1 absent — Frank

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kent Satterwhite, Canadian River Municipal Water Authority; TJ Patterson, City of Fort Worth; David Holt, Colorado River Municipal Water District; Hope Wells, San Antonio Water System; Bill Stevens, Texas Alliance of Energy Producers; Stephen Minick, Texas Association of Business; Kyle Frazier and Steven Walden, Texas Desalination Association; Shanna Igo, Texas Municipal League)

Against — None

On — Charles Maguire, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

BACKGROUND: Desalination is the process of removing salt from seawater or brackish water. In addition to producing potable water, desalination yields a salty waste product that traditionally requires disposal. Many inland desalination projects inject this waste product into underground wells or discharge it into a surface water source. Discharging into surface water may require blending the salty waste with desalinated water in order to meet water quality standards. Desalination facilities closer to the coast often deposit the salty waste into the sea.

Class V underground injection wells are permitted by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) for the shallow injection of nonhazardous fluids underground, typically into or above underground sources of drinking water. Class V injection wells are regulated to prevent drinking water contamination or adverse effects on public health.

Examples of class V wells include industrial waste disposal wells, storm water drainage wells, and large-capacity septic systems.

Class II underground injection wells are permitted by the Texas Railroad Commission for the disposal of oil and gas exploration-related waste.

DIGEST: HB 2230 would allow the disposal of class V-authorized nonhazardous brine or nonhazardous drinking water treatment residuals from desalination operations into class II wells.

The bill would authorize the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to use its class V injection well authority — by individual permit, general permit, or permit by rule — for the disposal of desalination waste streams into a class II injection well permitted by the Texas Railroad Commission. TCEQ and the Railroad Commission would, by rule, be required to enter into a memorandum of understanding on this dual authorization authority.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2015.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 2230 would allow the use of class II wells for the disposal of class V-authorized, nonhazardous desalination waste streams without requiring a time-consuming and costly permitting process.

One of the most expensive parts of the desalination process is disposing of the salty waste left over from desalinating water. More than 50,000 class II injection wells used for the disposal of oil and gas-related waste are already permitted and operational across the state. This bill would allow the nonhazardous desalination waste stream — essentially a salty brine that is already authorized to be deposited into a shallow class V well — to instead be injected into a much deeper class II oil and gas injection well. The bill could reduce the need for drilling new class V wells and the wasteful practice of blending the salty waste with produced water in order to discharge it into a surface water source. This authorization has been thoroughly vetted by all affected agencies, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Texas Railroad Commission, and the

Environmental Protection Agency.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.