



**WATER SUPPLY CITIZENS  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
to the Mass. Water Resources Authority

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The Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC) is pleased to offer testimony in support of HR 834. WSCAC is a volunteer committee charged with offering analysis and input to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority on issues relating to the Authority, and to water issues in Massachusetts generally.

Just as the physical infrastructure of a water system sometimes needs updating, so does the legislative infrastructure that governs water management. WSCAC itself helped craft some of the very progressive legislation that has guided Massachusetts water policy over the last two decades, but the fact that many rivers and streams continue to experience low flows and resource degradation speaks to the need for a legislative “tune-up”. Adjusting the Water Management Act to take flow standards into account will provide a much needed fix and strengthen the resilience of rivers and streams in the face of development pressures and climate change.

This legislation is particularly needed in the face of climate change, which will impact aquatic resources disproportionately. No less than the Global Warming Solutions Act or the Green Communities Act, the Water Resources Sustainability Act can be seen as a piece of climate change legislation which, if passed, will strengthen existing legislation. Currently, committees have been created under the GWSA to address both mitigation of climate change – how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions – and adaptation, or how to best strengthen systems against the impacts of climate change that we know we can't avoid. Better management and conservation of water resources constitutes both mitigation and adaptation, since pumping and treatment of water is one of the greatest municipal uses of energy and chemicals, and since better flow standards would increase resiliency of aquatic systems against the more frequent and intense droughts and floods in coming years.

Opponents of the bill may claim that it represents an elevation of certain “values”, favoring protection of rivers and aquatic life over the more “human” and economic values of municipal water systems. This is a narrow oversimplification. The entire built infrastructure is underpinned by an “ecological infrastructure”, and degradation of that underpinning can lead to costs without end. We face a new day, a new climate, and new stresses on our systems – realities that are appreciated by those that see a bigger picture. Furthermore, any costs associated with the bill will be balanced by significant benefits. For instance, wastewater treatment plants sometimes have trouble meeting discharge standards because many rivers and streams simply do not enough water to dilute effluent. Improved water management and increased flow in rivers receiving wastewater inputs would help mitigate this problem.

As an advisory committee to the MWRA, WSCAC is very familiar with the enormous water savings realized by the Authority following water conservation and leak detection efforts. As a consequence, water use in Boston is currently as low as it was in the early

1900's. While growth in water use has slowed generally, there is still low-hanging fruit for water conservation in many communities. Resistance by water suppliers to promote conservation because of consequent rate increases should not be considered a legitimate reason for opposing HR 834, for this then balances the “water budget” on the back of our key aquatic resources. In a state with abundant precipitation such as Massachusetts, there is little excuse for not managing our water resources so that there is enough to assure the long-term sustainability of our rivers and streams.

Respectfully,  
Mary S. Booth  
Executive Director, WSCAC