



COUNTY OF MENDOCINO

Board of Supervisors

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June 20, 2024

The Honorable Diane Papan
Assemblymember, District 21
1021 O Street, Suite 4220
Sacramento, CA 94249-0021

**Re: AB 1359 (Papan) California Environmental Quality Act: geothermal exploratory projects:
lead agency - SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Papan,

I am reaching out on behalf of the Mendocino Board of Supervisors to express our endorsement for AB 1359.

Geothermal power holds tremendous potential in helping California achieve its climate objectives, especially when other renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, are not available, for instance, during the night or in winter. However, prior to the initiation of a geothermal field development, the developer is required to drill exploratory wells to collect subsurface data, validate project feasibility, and guide design decisions. Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the drilling of an exploratory well is treated as a separate project with its own environmental review process, distinct from the broader geothermal field development. This approach is rational as the initial exploratory well has a significantly smaller scale and impact.

A specific state law provision that designates the state Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) as the lead agency under CEQA for geothermal exploration projects presents a major obstacle to the progress of geothermal power in California. The relevant provision of law - Public Resources Code §3715.5 - was initially implemented to expedite geothermal development but is now having the opposite effect. CalGEM is facing substantial delays due to resource constraints associated with its role in oil and gas permitting. These delays compel developers to wait for years before they can assess the feasibility of a site for geothermal development, let alone complete the project and start generating clean power. This unique requirement, not applicable to any other form of renewable energy, is a provision that could potentially stifle new geothermal development in California.

Counties are capable of serving as the lead agency for larger, more intricate geothermal field development projects, and they can also fulfill this role for geothermal exploration. The removal of Public Resources Code §3715.5, as proposed in AB 1359, will enable geothermal exploration projects to

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secure a lead agency under CEQA in the same manner as any other project, rather than being hindered by the current requirement. This proposal will not compromise CEQA or lower environmental standards. It will simply ensure that geothermal exploration wells undergo the same CEQA process as other projects in the state.

The Board of Supervisors of Mendocino County supports AB 1359 for these reasons.
Sincerely,



Maureen Mulheren, Chair
Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

CC: The Honorable Jim Wood, California State Assembly, 2nd District
The Honorable Mike McGuire, California State Senate, 2nd District