

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6125

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Ways & Means, May 26, 2015

**Title:** An act relating to emergency drought response.

**Brief Description:** Concerning emergency drought response.

**Sponsors:** Senators Honeyford, Keiser and Warnick.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Ways & Means: 5/26/15 [DPS].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6125 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hill, Chair; Braun, Vice Chair; Dammeier, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Vice Chair, Capital Budget Chair; Hargrove, Ranking Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Member on the Capital Budget; Bailey, Becker, Billig, Brown, Conway, Fraser, Hasegawa, Hatfield, Hewitt, O'Ban, Parlette, Rolfes, Schoesler and Warnick.

**Staff:** Brian Sims (786-7431)

**Background:** The Department of Ecology (DOE) is authorized to take various actions and provided support to state agencies and local government entities to mitigate the effects of a drought. Drought conditions exist when the water supply for a geographical area or for a significant portion of a geographical area is below 75 percent of normal and the water shortage is likely to create undue hardships for various water users and uses.

On May 15, 2015, the Governor expanded his declaration of drought conditions to a statewide drought.

Funding for drought response is through the State Drought Preparedness Account (SDPA). The account does not have a regular source of revenue.

**Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute):** Fourteen million dollars of the general fund is appropriated to the SDPA in Fiscal Year 2015. Those funds are appropriated from the SDPA, along with \$4 million in bonds, to the DOE for emergency drought response. This

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appropriation is a supplemental increase in the capital budget for 2013-15 biennium. This will allow the DOE to begin emergency drought response immediately. The appropriations are reappropriated for the 2015-17 biennium.

If drought conditions are not declared for 2016, any unobligated amounts in the SDPA must be transferred to the Disaster Preparedness Account. DOE must also consider, along with other criteria, the alleviation of immediate hardship in allocating resources.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute):** The department must also consider, along with other criteria, the alleviation of immediate hardship in allocating resources.

**Appropriation:** \$18 million.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: We are facing severe water supply cut backs for junior water right holders. The sooner Ecology has funding the sooner they can start to mitigate the sum of the effects of the drought. Some of the irrigation districts are facing water supplies that are 25 percent of normal.

OTHER: The Governor has declared a statewide drought. We have record low snowpack in the mountains. We don't have a preference for the mechanism chosen for drought funding but their are important steps we can take as soon as there is funding. We will pass an emergency rule to speed the determination of the qualifications for getting financial assistance.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Jim Halstrom, WA State Tree Fruit Association; Mike Schwisow, Washington State Water Resources Association (irrigation districts).

OTHER: Dave Christensen, Department of Ecology.

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