

Mello's water-agency bill running into opposition

The Aromas County Water District withdrew its support Wednesday for the proposed Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency, but the action apparently comes too late to influence legislation now on the Assembly floor.

Water board chairman Willard Parker signed a letter Wednesday to state Sen. Henry Mello, author of the legislation, and Assemblyman Sam Farr, saying: "The board of directors ... can not support the legislation and, if the amendments stand, the board of directors will seek to have the water district excluded from the agency's boundary."

But Mello said Thursday it was too late to amend the water-agency bill and still have it on the governor's desk for signature and "chapterization" (assignment of a place in the California statutes) by June 28 — the deadline that would allow it to get on the November ballots of Pajaro Valley voters.

"I'm just sorry they are waiting so late," Mello said. "I'm sorry they are taking this kind

of position."

Parker said if the water district is included in the proposed water management agency when it goes to the voters this November, the water board will fight against passage of the measure.

"We might (have to) stay in the agency," Parker said Thursday when informed of Mello's "too late" response, "but we will be campaigning to defeat it."

The Aromas board's major objection, Parker said, is to an amendment to the bill made at the request of Santa Cruz County supervisors restricting to agriculture the use of any water imported into the valley from the federal San Felipe Water Project.

Parker said the district directors initially supported the agency because they viewed that water as a potential backup source if the district's own wells failed.

"We thought we would be able to get water here on an emergency basis if our wells went down. Now we would receive no

water, from the way the bill is written at this time, and we shouldn't be paying fees for the system if there is no benefit," Parker said.

The directors also objected to the requirement, again placed in the bill at the behest of Santa Cruz County supervisors, that any water management plan conform to the general plans of the county and the city of Watsonville — "a provision that places the control of the (water district) in the hands of the Boards of Supervisors," Parker said.

A third objection is to the appointment of water agency directors by the county and the city of Watsonville, he said.

Mello said in Sacramento Thursday, "Gary Patton is unhappy, Ray Amrhein (the Aromas County Water District attorney who drafted the letter signed by Parker) is unhappy, some of the citizens committee is unhappy. But we are going to set up a water management agency. I'm trying to avoid seeing the valley become a dust bowl."