

Sen. Wolk's measures receive fiscal approval

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The state Assembly's chief fiscal committee gave its stamp of approval Wednesday to three bills to increase access to clean, renewable energy and help the state reach its energy and environmental goals.

"My legislation provides equity in the state's renewable energy policy by removing unnecessary barriers to small-scale renewable energy projects," said Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis. "It also gives farmers and food processors a way to reduce their energy bills by producing their own heat and power from what is otherwise a waste product."

SB 489 would enable all eligible renewable energy types, including biomass and biogas, to utilize California's Net Energy Metering program, which allows customers to offset some of their power usage with the energy they generate on site. Only wind, solar, and fuel cell generators are currently able to take advantage of the NEM program's streamlined process of getting energy connected to the electrical grid.

Russ Lester from Dixon Ridge Farms, organic walnut producers and processors, testified in support of the bill.

"The current Net Energy Metering program does not allow us to connect our bio energy with our solar panels, and the Feed-in-Tariff program does not allow our California Solar Initiative solar installations to be connected with our bio energy. We find ourselves in a catch 22 situation," Lester said. "SB 489 helps agricultural producers and processors convert renewable byproducts into clean renewable energy, allowing us

to become more sustainable and helping offset our energy use."

The Appropriations committee also approved SB 244, which ensures that cities and counties review and update the elements of their general plans to include data and analysis regarding unincorporated

island, fringe, or legacy communities. This requirement applies the next time that local officials revise their general plans and each time they revise their housing elements.

The bill also requires Local Agency Formation Commissions, in the next revision of their five-year municipal service reviews, to identify disadvantaged communities, and examine the water, sewer and fire protection deficiencies within these communities. This will ensure that local planning responds to the unmet needs of California's poorest communities and supports the development of healthy, equitable, and prosperous communities for all Californians.

The third measure by Wolk approved by the committee, SB 818, would bring California's standards into conformity with recently updated USDA standards for "extra virgin" olive oil.

Wolk, who chairs the Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Olive Oil Production and Emerging Products, says the legislation is "a necessary first step to both protect consumers and level the playing field between the fast-growing California olive oil industry and imported brands that dominate the market with largely low-quality products mislabeled as 'extra virgin' olive oil."

SB 818, as well as SB 244 and SB 489, will next be heard by the full Assembly.

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