



Time to approve desalination project

*City of Carlsbad Mayor Matt Hall
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The city of Carlsbad, like San Diego as a region, has worked hard to build strong biotechnology research, tourism and manufacturing industries, as well as support the continuing viability of agriculture. For these important sectors to remain competitive in the future, we must create reliable, local water sources.

Relying almost exclusively on imported water, as we do now, puts us at the mercy of drought and water politics. That's why the public overwhelmingly supports development of drought-proof water sources such as the Carlsbad Desalination Project.

In all of my years in public office, I have never been witness to a project as well-vetted by the public. This project has gained every approval and permit needed for construction from numerous local, state and federal agencies and has withstood more than a dozen legal challenges to those approvals. The proposed water purchase agreement between the San Diego County Water Authority and Poseidon Resources has been the product of 28 months of comprehensive due diligence by the Water Authority and a team of engineering, finance and legal experts with broad experience in development of public-private partnerships of this nature.

The Water Authority's focus in negotiating the agreement has been to assign appropriate risks to the private developer (Poseidon and its investors), while keeping costs for water ratepayers as low as possible. All of the details of the water purchase agreement, including contract terms and costs, have been widely distributed to the public and the subject of nearly three dozen public meetings. Today the San Diego County Water Authority will hold a special board meeting on the project, leading up to a final board decision expected later this month.

The city of Carlsbad took a leadership position to help bring this project to fruition more than a decade ago, and local community support remains especially high here in Carlsbad, where the plant will be located. At the County Water Authority's public workshop on Oct. 10, more than 200 people came to weigh in on the project with the overwhelming majority expressing strong support.

Staff at the city of Carlsbad has a comprehensive understanding of the project costs and rate impacts associated with the Water Authority's participation in the project, as well as our city's option to purchase up to 5,000 acre feet/year of the water as an additional local supply. Although the cost of this water is more than current imported sources, it is comparable to other new sources of locally controlled water. Most importantly, it is drought proof, which in our climate is critically important.

Not only does a reliable water supply support a strong regional economy, the construction of the Carlsbad Desalination Project will infuse millions of dollars into the regional economy while creating hundreds of new jobs in the desalination, engineering, construction and service industries. The plant will support an estimated 2,000 jobs and generate millions in regional spending during construction, not to mention creating hundreds of jobs post-construction.

The time for the County Water Authority Board to take action is now, and they must do so with firm resolve. The same small minority of environmental activists who have delayed and unsuccessfully litigated the project are still trying to get in the way of the County Water Authority Board taking final action. This handful of individuals is now raising concern over the project's costs. The fact that these individuals are now acting as ratepayer advocates is rather disingenuous given the millions of dollars in increased project costs that have resulted from their delay tactics - costs that will be paid by the county's ratepayers.

If we are going to create a bright future for our region, preserve our quality of life and support a thriving economy, we need to gain greater water independence. That's why the city of Carlsbad stepped up when this project was first proposed, and that's why I continue to support this project today.

On behalf of the residents of Carlsbad, I call on the leadership of the Water Authority board to approve the water purchase agreement with Poseidon Resources this month and bring a drought-proof source of water for our businesses and citizens.