

Environment & Energy

# Desalination Plant Should Be Nixed, California Report Recommends

By Zach Bright

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- California Coastal Commission recommends against permit
  - Plant presents environmental consequences, opponents say
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The California Coastal Commission advised against a permit in a new report on a multinational company's plans to build a desalination site in Orange County's Huntington Beach.

The commission's report, released Monday, was the latest development in a more than two-decades-long saga to construct a desalination plant. The report said Poseidon Water—a Brookfield Asset Management subsidiary behind the plans—should be denied a permit based on environmental, health, safety, and justice concerns.

The final decision hinges on a Coastal Commission vote set for May 12 to grant or deny a permit.

Susan Jordan, executive director of the California Coastal Protection Network, which opposes the plan, said in a statement that the report "validates our decades of research into this plant and how it would strike a blow to our environment, cause further economic injustice and hurt communities already facing environmental inequities."

Poseidon Water said no infrastructure project in the state had been scrutinized as closely.

"If this recommendation stands, it will effectively be the death knell for desalination in California," it said in a statement.

## Benefits, Concerns

Gov. Gavin Newsom (D), Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), other members of Congress, and state legislators have backed the cause. Another large-scale seawater desalination facility in Southern California fully opened in 2015.

The proponents say a desalination plant is needed because water is in short supply due to drought. The plant is projected to prepare 50 million gallons of water each day.

“The first three months of this year alone have been the driest in recorded history,” a spokesperson from Newsom’s office said. “This administration is committed to ensuring the sustainability of California’s water supply with an all-of-the above strategy, and that includes desalination.”

It’s also drawn support from California’s State Building and Construction Trade Council, which has touted the project as a job creation opportunity.

However, Stop Poseidon members said that the project application violates the California Coastal Act and fails the California Environmental Quality Act. The group also said Poseidon Water hasn’t completed a National Environmental Policy Act review.

The facility would be built on a brownfield site near concealed wells that opponents say are “beset with hazards.” It would kill 108 million marine organisms annually once operational, according to the Santa Ana Regional Water Board.

### Water Rates

It also fails on environmental justice, Stop Poseidon members said. Ratepayers in the community would be forced to buy water at a higher rate than they pay now, they added.

“Their play is to come in and privatize a portion of California’s water supply and sell it at a profit to the locals for 50 years, under a ‘take or pay’ contract to pay off their global investors,” Jordan of the California Coastal Protection Network said.

Jordan and other members said that alternatives like water reuse facilities would have fewer impacts and better benefits.

If permitted, the project would be the first desalination plant built after California’s 2015 Ocean Plan Desalination Amendment, which set up a process for permitting seawater desalination facilities.

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## Documents

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