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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sharon Soormaghen, sharon@lawaterkeeper.org, (310) 394-6162 x108

PROLIFIC COSTS OF PROPOSED SOUTH BAY OCEAN DESALINATION PLANT EXPOSED

Smarter Water LA coalition calls on new West Basin General Manager to abandon plans for proposed ocean desalination facility

LOS ANGELES (February 26, 2018)—Today, a coalition of environmentalists, public health advocates, and LA County residents formalized its opposition to a proposed ocean desalination plant in the South Bay. Dubbed “Smarter Water LA,” the alliance launched a [new website](#) and released a revealing analysis of the energy needs and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with the controversial project.

West Basin Municipal Water District (West Basin) has proposed building a 20-60 million gallons per day ocean desalination facility in El Segundo. A wholesale water agency servicing 17 cities throughout LA County, West Basin has historically been a leader in sensible water management by promoting conservation to reduce water waste and pursuing water recycling to enhance local supplies.

However, Smarter Water LA’s extensive research highlights the fiscal and environmental irresponsibility of West Basin’s ocean desalination plans. The proposed facility, which would be built less than 2 miles down the coast from the Hyperion Water Reclamation Plant, will cost at least \$400 million and up to hundreds of millions more to build, and will inevitably increase ratepayers’ monthly water bills.

“It is irrational to invest in ocean desalination before undertaking feasible, cost-effective, climate-friendly water supply solutions, including increased conservation, wastewater purification, stormwater capture, and desalting brackish groundwater,” said Bruce Reznik, Executive Director of Los Angeles Waterkeeper, one of the environmental organizations leading the coalition. “We live in a world of limited resources. Investing in the most expensive, energy-intensive and environmentally harmful option first inevitably diverts resources away from superior solutions.”

A [GHG assessment](#), prepared by Powers Engineering and released concurrently with the coalition launch, concludes that desalting 20 million gallons of seawater each day will contribute 44,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year. Ocean desalination requires considerably more energy than other water supply options – it is even more energy-intensive than importing water hundreds of miles across the state from Northern California to LA County.

Noted Dr. Shelley Luce, President and CEO of coalition-member Heal the Bay, “As the LA region and California are already feeling the devastating effects of climate change and extreme weather—from historic droughts to devastating flooding and wildfires—it makes absolutely no sense to prioritize investment in water solutions that will actually increase the region’s carbon footprint.”

Another longtime activist, Craig Cadwallader, channels the South Bay community’s concerns into his role at Surfrider Foundation. “South Bay residents do not want to see another eyesore built on the beach,” noted Cadwallader. “Solving LA’s water crisis should not involve more coastal development.”

Not only would this desalination plant bring another industrial blemish to LA's coast, it would likely cause harm to the ocean ecosystem. Seawater intakes and discharges create adverse impacts on the marine environment, including impingement and entrainment of wildlife as well as the disposal of highly concentrated brine and other pollutants into the ecosystem.

The Smarter Water LA coalition advocates for a “**4R**” approach to promoting local water security – **R**educe water waste, **R**euse stormwater and greywater, **R**ecycle wastewater, and **R**estore contaminated groundwater.

Conner Everts, Facilitator of the Environmental Water Caucus, who has been advocating against the proposed plant for more than a decade, noted, “West Basin has the right idea— it's critical for the LA region to bolster our local water resources. But there are sensible ways to leverage taxpayer dollars into smart, sustainable water infrastructure—and that does not include seawater desalination. With a new General Manager starting at West Basin today, we hope the agency returns to its roots as a leader on sustainable water management and abandons its plans to pursue ocean desalination.”

On February 20, West Basin announced that Patrick Sheilds, formerly the Executive Director of Operations for Irvine Ranch Water District, is starting as the new West Basin General Manager as of today.

“The icing on the cake is the proposed site for the plant,” added Reznik. “To build a desalination facility in close proximity to a sewage treatment plant that currently discharges over 200 million gallons of treated wastewater into the ocean every day makes no sense. We need to be purifying that water to augment local supplies, rather than dumping it into the ocean, only to be sucked back up and desalted at added expense.”

“We strongly encourage West Basin to continue its leadership position as an internationally recognized innovator in wastewater recycling technology,” noted Cadwallader. “We applaud the recent [announcement](#) that West Basin and the City of LA are piloting efforts to possibly double the water recycling capacity from their decades-long partnership, and we would like to see this project come to fruition at an even larger scale.”

The Smarter Water LA coalition is anxiously awaiting the long-delayed release of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed project, now scheduled for March, and will be submitting detailed comments on the document upon its release.

“While we appreciate the due diligence West Basin is undertaking relating to this project,” added Everts, “we are afraid that their massive investment in studying desalination—an estimated \$63M spent on nearly two dozen studies over 17 years—will put added pressure on the Board to move ahead with this ill-conceived project. We urge West Basin to follow the old saying and not ‘throw good money after bad’, and turn the page on ocean desalination.”

Learn more about West Basin's proposal and the alternatives at www.SmarterWaterLA.org.

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ABOUT SMARTER WATER LA

The Smarter Water LA coalition believes that cost-effective and environmentally beneficial local water supply options should take precedence over ocean desalination. For more information, visit www.SmarterWaterLA.org.

ABOUT LOS ANGELES WATERKEEPER

Los Angeles Waterkeeper safeguards LA's inland and coastal waters by enforcing laws and empowering communities. For more information, visit www.LAWaterkeeper.org.

ABOUT HEAL THE BAY

Heal the Bay is dedicated to making the coastal waters and watersheds of Greater Los Angeles safe, healthy and clean. For more information, visit www.HealtheBay.org

ABOUT SURFRIDER FOUNDATION

The Surfrider Foundation is dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's ocean, waves and beaches through a powerful activist network. For more information, visit www.surfrider.org.

ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL WATER CAUCUS

The mission of the Environmental Water Caucus is to achieve comprehensive, sustainable water management solutions for all Californians. For more information, visit www.EWCCalifornia.org.