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# CALIFORNIA STATE LANDS COMMISSION POSTPONES DECISION ON CARLSBAD DESALINATION PROJECT

*Cites Lack of Information and Need for Carbon Neutrality*

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(SAN DIEGO) At a packed public hearing yesterday, the California State Lands Commission (SLC), chaired by Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi, declined to approve a lease for a proposed 50 million gallon per day desalination facility in Carlsbad. The Carlsbad Desalination Project (CDP) needs approval from SLC and the California Coastal Commission to move forward.

In delaying a decision, Commissioners noted the need for more information on a variety of potential environmental impacts of the proposed facility, and also cited the recent fires that hindered the ability of some groups to provide timely comments.

Garnering the greatest amount of attention at the hearing was the CDP's potential impact on climate change. Ocean desalination demands far more energy than other water supply alternative, including conservation, water recycling and increased water storage. Commissioners repeated often during the hearing that this facility must be 'carbon neutral' (adding no CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to the environment) in order to gain approval, particularly in light of the recently adopted Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32), which mandates reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

Late last week, Poseidon released a statement promising to address energy concerns and be a carbon neutral facility. However, its press release and testimony in front of SLC offered few specifics of how this goal is to be realized, and Poseidon's estimates of carbon emission are dramatically lower than independent estimates prepared by staff of the State Lands Commission, California Coastal Commission and environmental groups.

According to Surfrider Policy Coordinator Joe Geever, "We applaud Poseidon's realization that its project must be carbon neutral, especially given the potential impact the project will have on California's commitment to reduce global warming. But, we agree with the State Lands Commission, saying it doesn't make it so. From the information provided, we simply can't see how they can meet this commitment and keep its promise to provide water at a cost matching current prices."

The Poseidon project has also drawn broad criticism from the environmental community and fishing organizations for its plans to use an outdated and destructive technology to intake water from the sensitive Agua Hedionda lagoon. Poseidon originally planned to use the discharged cooling water

from the Encina Power Station as its “source water” for the desalination plant to save on energy and water costs. However, Encina has applied to the California Energy Commission for a permit to upgrade its older generators with high-efficiency equipment that no longer needs to suck water in from the ocean for cooling purposes.

“It would be a travesty to see Encina take steps to reduce impacts in this impaired water body only to have Poseidon step in and continue this unnecessary environmental degradation. There are ways to get seawater into the desalination facility that avoid these impacts, including subsurface intakes. Poseidon should be compelled to use the best available technology,” said Marco Gonzalez, a Partner at Coast Law Group and attorney for several groups opposed to the project.

“We still believe the region can meet most of its growing water demand by first increasing our conservation efforts, recycling more wastewater, and restoring groundwater through improved watershed management,” said Bruce Reznik, Executive Director of San Diego Coastkeeper. “These alternatives not only reduce our energy consumption and are far more cost-effective than desalination, but also reduce pollution of our coastal and ocean waters while helping to restore robust and diverse marine life communities.”

“We commend the State Lands Commission for being the first agency to really examine the true costs of all the promises Poseidon has made, and the true impact of this project,” commented San Diego Coastkeeper’s Legal Director Gabriel Solmer. “It may not be easy, but it is necessary to ensure the highest standards for protecting our coast and ocean.”

The Commission has tentatively schedule the matter to come back at its December 3<sup>rd</sup> hearing.

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