

**SOUTH COAST
WATER DISTRICT**

Partnering With The Community



The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chairman
House Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman Grijalva and Subcommittee Members:

On behalf of South Coast Water District (SCWD), we appreciate the opportunity to provide this written testimony to the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife relative to the Desalination Development Act.

SCWD, established in 1932, provides water and wastewater services to approximately 36,000 residents, 1,000 businesses and two million visitors per year in south coastal Orange County. Our service area includes Dana Point, South Laguna, and parts of San Clemente and San Juan Capistrano.

Our district, like others in south Orange County, is almost exclusively reliant upon imported water from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, provided via the Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWDOC), for drinking water.

However, you may have heard that southern California has recently experienced dozens of earthquakes, including a 6.4 magnitude quake on July 4th and a 7.1 quake the next day. Five different earthquake faults cross the primary imported water transmission lines to south Orange County. Should we experience a major quake along any of these faults, our district's residents could be without our primary source of drinking water for 60 days (and potentially one year for a major disruption of the State Water Project system).

In response, SCWD is building a sustainable, resilient local water portfolio for south Orange County. Our Doheny Ocean Desalination Project (Project) will be a District-owned, environmentally responsible, drought-proof water supply project, and for all these reasons and more it enjoys strong, diverse local and regional support.

The initial phase of the Project would provide five million gallons of drinking water, more than enough to serve the South Coast Water District and interested partners in South Orange County. The Project would provide a continuous emergency water supply during an imported water outage caused by earthquake(s) or other natural disaster and could provide much needed fire flows during and after these calamities.

The facility will significantly enhance our local water – reducing 90% dependence on Colorado River and other external sources – and create an initial capacity of up to five million gallons per day (MGD), with a maximum of 15MGD. The optimal Dana Point location is on SCWD property within about 100 yards of regional water transmission lines.



The Project enjoys overwhelming community support, with polls showing that 77.6% of area residents support ocean water desalination. In addition, the Project was highly recommended in the 2018 Municipal Water District of Orange County Reliability Study (https://www.mwdoc.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018-FINAL-OC-Study-Report_Final-Report_02-01-2019-with-appendices.pdf). SCWD’s own public working group produced similar findings (http://www.scwd.org/services/drinking/supply/water_reliability/default.htm).

The Project also relies upon the preferred regulatory approach, following the California State Ocean Plan recommended technologies and design for intake and discharge. By using slant wells that are fully buried (i.e., vault and well) beneath the ocean floor, we will be able to protect plant and animal marine life. The Project will also combine the brine (salty water extracted during the desalination process) with existing treated wastewater in the adjacent San Juan Creek Outfall, then discharged to the ocean more than 2 miles offshore, as recommended in the Ocean Plan.

This Project is critical to the future quality of life of our region. SCWD residents and businesses continue to achieve an average of 20% conservation as compared to 2013 levels. Our population has increased by approximately 10%, but potable water demands have dropped by over 30% over the past 25 years. Furthermore, SCWD’s 3% to 4% water system loss is among the best in California, and the District owns a Recycled Water Treatment facility and maintains a Recycled Water System that distributes more than 900 acre-feet per year for landscape irrigation.

The Doheny Desalination Project is a component of our diversified water portfolio. SCWD owns a reverse osmosis treatment facility and groundwater well, treating and distributing nearly 1 MGD of groundwater from the San Juan groundwater basin during normal or wet hydrologic periods. We are also a partner in the San Juan Watershed stormwater capture project, which is currently in the permitting phase.

The SCWD Board of Directors certified the Doheny Desalination Project Environmental Impact Report on June 27th, 2019. SCWD is now planning to initiate the permitting and contract development process.

The cost of construction for the Project is an estimated \$107 million. The cost of water (net) after state grants and loan is an *estimated* \$1,465 / AF or \$5 to \$7 per residential meter. The cost estimates are being refined over the next several months, using the most up-to-date information. SCWD staff anticipates that construction will take approximately 24 months from the date of groundbreaking.

The recommendations within the Desalination Development Act are critical to our efforts to deliver an environmentally AND economically viable project, and your consideration and support of the recommended language is greatly appreciated.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Shintaku". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rick Shintaku
General Manager