

## **Letter from Monterey County Elected Leaders to the State Water Resources Control Board**

June 11, 2020

Joaquin Esquivel, Chair  
Board of Directors  
State Water Resources Control Board

Dear Chair Esquivel and Board Members:

As elected leaders in Monterey County, it is our responsibility to advocate for the economic and environmental well-being of our citizens. We were concerned to read the letter from your Executive Director, Eileen Sobeck, to the California Coastal Commission that made several statements that need correction in regard to California American Water's proposed desalination plant.

We write to express our concerns about why this desalination plant is not the right solution for our region and should be set aside in favor of our Pure Water Monterey facility.

We support timely compliance with the SWRCB's Cease and Desist Order (CDO) on the Carmel River. Expansion of the Pure Water Monterey (PWM) recycling plant is the fastest way to meet the CDO. Cal-Am's desalination plant is not needed to meet the Peninsula's water demand and is rife with legal and environmental complications that will only further delay compliance.

Our PWM plant has now been celebrated by both the Newsom Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency for its innovative treatment of agricultural and municipal wastewater and its use of on-site landfill gas. PWM also comports with the SWRCB's policy to maximize water recycling in California.

### **The Pure Water Monterey is easily capable of meeting water demand on the Monterey Peninsula.**

The CPUC's 2018 decision to approve Cal-Am's desalination plant was based on antiquated data from 2007 to 2016 that assumed a demand of 14,000 acre-feet per year for the Monterey Peninsula.

Yet three recent studies and reports by local public agencies show the Monterey Peninsula's real water demand over the last five years is 9,825 AFY. These reports confirm that expanding Pure Water Monterey's current yield of 3,500 AFY by 2,250 acre feet would provide ample water to eliminate illegal diversions from the Carmel River and meet demand for at least 30 years.

In order to justify building a desalination plant that would yield an additional 6,200 AFY and over \$100 million in corporate profits, Cal-Am has disputed the 9,825 AFY demand figure. Yet in Cal-Am's current General Rate Case before the CPUC, Cal-Am's David Mitchell testified that our demand would be 9,338 AF in 2021, 9,478 AF in 2022, and 9,610 AF in 2023.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that the 14,000 AFY estimate is grossly inaccurate, Ms. Sobeck wrote,

"Even though actual water use within Cal-Am's Monterey District service area in recent years has been lower

than the Public Utilities Commission's estimated current demand, State Water Board staff does not have a basis for concluding that the Public Utilities Commission's prior analysis and determinations regarding the water demand, sizing, reliability, or diversity of supply were unreasonable, invalid, or outdated."

Such a conclusion suggests an unfortunate bias in favor of a project that our constituents do not need and cannot afford. After the Coastal Commission staff recommended denial of Cal-Am's desalination permit last November, Cal-Am and its allies launched a sabotage campaign to derail the expansion of Pure Water Monterey.

Unfortunately, Ms. Sobeck's letter was recently used by Cal-Am and its allies on the Monterey One Water board as arguable rationale for their ongoing effort to deny approval of the final SEIR for the PWM expansion. Despite their efforts, we remain confident that the PWM Expansion will be approved.

We urge the Board to seriously consider the devastating consequences that an unnecessary desalination plant would have on the people and the environment of the Monterey Peninsula.

Environmentally, Cal-Am's desal plant would destroy 7 acres of Marina's beautiful coastal dunes. This desal plant would use a massive 38,000-megawatt hours of power from PG&E and become the region's largest emitter of greenhouse gases on the coast at a time when climate change is getting worse. The plant also creates gross environmental injustice for the lower-income, predominantly minority communities of Marina and Seaside.

Groundwater rights issues have not been addressed. Cal-Am's desalination plant would draw up to 17,300 AFY from the already overdrafted Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin. Under the SGMA definition of groundwater, most of the desal's source water is groundwater. Cal Am has no legal right to this water and the Agency Act prohibits exportation of groundwater from the Basin. Moreover, the project will - by design - exacerbate seawater intrusion, which endangers Marina's long-term water supply. It will also lower groundwater levels in the Dune Sand Aquifer, adversely impacting groundwater dependent ecosystems in the project area, including Coastal wetlands.

Economically, Cal-Am's desal would cost \$1.2 billion over 30 years compared to \$190 million for the Pure Water Monterey Expansion. Constructing and financing the desalination plant would double water bills when our constituents already pay some of the highest water bills in the nation. This increase would make the cost of living and doing business here unaffordable and would undoubtedly force residents and small businesses to leave our region. And this would make economic recovery from Covid-19 even more difficult.

Because of all these potential obstacles our local public agencies, despite Cal-Am, have worked together to solve our water supply problem with the Pure Water Monterey project and its proposed Expansion.

As it currently stands, Cal-Am only needs an additional 800 AFY to fully comply with the Cease and Desist order and the Seaside Basin overdraft payback. The additional 2,250 AFY from the Pure Water Monterey Expansion can easily provide this. Spending \$1.2 billion for a desal plant is not warranted.

All that stands in the way of the Expansion of Pure Water Monterey is Cal Am's refusal to sign a Water Purchase Agreement. The CPUC has the power to move this solution forward by requiring Cal-Am to purchase the necessary replacement water from the Pure Water Monterey Expansion. Problem solved.

We urge your agency to support this solution.

Respectfully,

*Senator Bill Monning, California State Senate, District 17*  
*Assemblymember Mark Stone, California State Assembly, District 29*  
*Jane Parker, Monterey County Supervisor District 4*  
*Clyde Roberson, Mayor of Monterey*  
*Ian N. Oglesby, Mayor of Seaside*  
*Bruce Delgado, Mayor of Marina*  
*Alison Kerr, Mayor of Del Rey Oaks*  
*Jason Campbell, Seaside City Council*  
*Jon Wizard, Seaside City Council*  
*Jenny McAdams, Pacific Grove City Council*  
*Tyller Williamson, Monterey City Council*  
*Alan Haffa, Monterey City Council*  
*Jeff Baron, Carmel City Council*  
*Tom Moore, Marina Coast Water District Board, President*  
*Jan Shriner, Marina Coast Water District Board, Vice President*  
*Matthew Zefferman, Marina Coast Water District Board*  
*Lisa A. Berkley, Marina City Council*  
*Gail Morton, Marina City Council, Mayor Pro Tem*  
*Regina Gage, Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital Board, Vice President*

Cc:

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