

WATER QUALITY VICTORY IN THE MAKING

By Joe Geever

For several years our Huntington Beach/ Seal Beach and San Diego Chapters have opposed poorly designed ocean desalination facilities as a means to create freshwater. Desalination proponents planned to use the discharge from coastal power generators as “source water” for their factories — then use energy intensive processes to force the water through filters to remove the salts. Currently, coastal generators suck in trillions of gallons of water nationwide through “cooling water intakes,” which kill fish of all sorts and life stages — significantly impacting healthy marine ecosystems.

Plans for these “co-located” desal plans have likely come to a screeching halt with a recent federal court decision that “once-through cooling” does not meet the mandates of the Clean Water Act. This court victory was led by our friends at Riverkeeper Inc. and supported by Surfrider Foundation as a co-plaintiff.

The nation needs to better manage its water supplies if we are to meet ever-growing demands. But once we saw the connection to destructive open-ocean intakes, we set out to find better solutions.

Surfrider Foundation is championing solutions that both conserve wasted freshwater and reduce pollution at the same time. So-called “wastewater discharges” to our ocean can be purified and recycled for beneficial use on land. Improved residential irrigation and landscaping practices can save water and dramatically reduce urban runoff. Finally, networks of newly constructed treatment wetlands can recharge groundwater, restore coastal habitat and clean up our waterways and ocean.

These alternatives to desalination will put into action the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and Pew Ocean Commission recommendations for a more holistic approach to coastal and ocean protection. Our vision is progressive approaches to water supply and Clean Water Act compliance implemented nationwide. We will soon be identifying ways our members and chapters can implement solutions in their own homes, while simultaneously advocating for changes in government management.



U.S. OCEAN POLICY REPORT

“As the national dialogue on climate change continues, there should be explicit acknowledgment and inclusion of the essential role that oceans play in climate change.

The economic, social, and ecological ramifications associated with climate change are staggering, and a better understanding of ocean-related processes and their associated impacts will be necessary for policy makers and the public to make informed decisions on this issue.”

—Excerpt from the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative’s 2006 U.S. Ocean Policy Report Card

The Joint Ocean Commission Initiative is a collaborative effort of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission to catalyze ocean policy reform. For more information please visit www.jointoceancommission.org.