

STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE BRETT BARBRE, DIRECTOR,
THE MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT OF ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
BEFORE THE WATER AND POWER SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 6, 2005

Mr. Chairman, the Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, I am pleased to be here today and offer Congressional Testimony regarding H.R. 3929, legislation which amends the Water Desalination Act of 1996. As I begin my testimony today, I want to extend to Congressman Calvert our appreciation for his introduction of this legislation and for his leadership on water issues and, I might add, his keen interest in ocean water desalination.

By way of background, the Municipal Water District of Orange County, California, provides water to 30 cities and retail water agencies in Orange County. It is governed by a seven member elected board of directors. We are a member agency of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Our service area is 600 square miles and we have an ever increasing water demand of 623,000 acre feet of water every year. Our population is just over three million people.

We face significant water challenges in South Orange County, the site of the proposed Dana Point Desal Plant. This region is 95% dependent upon imported water to meet potable demand. A single water treatment plant and two pipelines supply imported water to more than 500,000 residents and businesses.

There are limited groundwater resources in this area. If there were an emergency outage of the imported water delivery system, it could cause significant problems for our residents, our businesses and the overall economy of Southern California. These concerns are quite real.

Our water district is actively working on improving our water reliability supplies.

We believe ocean water desalination provides one part of the solution to our long term need. With ocean water desalination we will obtain a reliable local source of water that can assist the South Orange County if an emergency water supply outage were to occur.

As you can imagine, any ocean water desalination infrastructure project in our country, not to mention – the State of California –brings with it, a number of research and development, environmental and feasibility studies, and preliminary engineering activity before a final decision can be made to go ahead with a full scale project. Many of these studies are required in order to be in compliance with federal environmental laws and regulations, not to mention other federal statutes. Under this bill, our water district will receive up to \$2.5 million in federal assistance to assist our district in completing the above mentioned studies. The bill places a “cap” of receiving no more than 25% of the total cost of the studies. This type of local cost sharing burden is consistent with other federal programs.

We have widespread political and popular support for this anticipated project and this legislation. The legislation has been cosponsored by the entire Congressional Orange County Delegation. Attached to my testimony is a letter of strong support from the Mayor of Dana Point, California, the President of the South Coast Water District and the Chairman of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

The Dana Point Desal Project will focus on the demonstration of a viable below the ocean floor, subsurface intake system, to eliminate impacts on the ocean environment. We will study the effectiveness and the environmental impacts of horizontal intake beach wells. Ultimately, this project would deliver some 15-20,000 acre feet of water per year.

This legislation does not authorize or fund the construction or operation and maintenance of the desal facility and it does not pay for any power to run the desal plant.

The up front costs associated with developing such a project are large, especially on the research front. This legislation will assist us in developing technology advancements and make them available to future desalination projects.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify this afternoon and for the Subcommittee’s consideration of this important piece of legislation. I am happy to respond to any questions. This concludes my statement.

