

Statement of Jack Garner  
Acting Deputy Commissioner and Deputy Director of Operations  
Bureau of Reclamation  
on H.R. 3929  
before the  
Subcommittee on Water and Power  
Committee on Resources  
House of Representatives

October 6, 2005

Mr. Chairman, my name is Jack Garner and I am Acting Deputy Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. I am pleased to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 3929, a bill to amend the Water Desalination Act of 1996 Act to authorize \$2.5 million for Reclamation to fund up to 25 percent of the research and development, environmental and feasibility studies, and preliminary engineering costs for the Municipal Water District of Orange County California, Dana Point Desalination Project located at Dana Point, California. While the Department continues to support ongoing R&D in the area of desalination technology when consistent with the Administration's Research and Development Criteria, and despite several positive implications of the proposed legislation, we cannot support H.R. 3929, at this time, for the reasons cited below.

This legislation would amend the Water Desalination Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-298) to authorize R&D, environmental and feasibility studies, and preliminary engineering for a desalination project in Orange County, California. The Water Desalination Act of 1996 authorizes the Secretary to award grants and to enter into contracts, subject to appropriations, to conduct, encourage, and assist in the financing of R&D processes for converting saline water into water suitable for beneficial uses. Under this authority in Fiscal Year 2005 Reclamation provided a grant to the Municipal Water District of Orange County California to perform research in connection with a pilot project for desalination. H.R. 3929 would build on that previous work.

Reclamation consistently strives to select research, development, and demonstration projects that promise to be innovative and could be applied by others if proven effective. The feasibility study that H.R. 3929 would authorize may present an opportunity for innovation. It would employ beach wells on a scale not previously tested. These are drilled horizontally from the treatment plant under the beach to the ocean intake. The wells may prove effective in 1) mitigating entrainment and entrapment of fish and other ocean species; 2) acting as a natural pretreatment to the desalination process, thereby reducing overall treatment costs; 3) providing a preferred conduit for disposing of concentrate in a manner preferable to conventional ocean dumping; and 4) reduces the visual impairment impact, a key impediment to plant siting. However, H. R. 3929 would bypass open competition and project evaluation processes embodied within the President's management agenda that are designed to ensure that the federal R & D investment is directed toward projects that offer the best opportunities to advance technologies in priority areas, and to ensure the best return for the investment of taxpayer dollars.

Finally, H.R. 3929 would amend the Water Desalination Act of 1996, which itself has an unknown future, for the Act's reauthorization is uncertain as to timing and form. This complicates our outlook on this bill.

That concludes my statement. I am pleased to answer any questions.