

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Editorial

### *HB desal facility deserves a permit*

Poseidon Water first proposed its desalination plant in Huntington Beach in 1998, only a few years after California had emerged from a drought.

By the time the company received its original operating permit in 2006, the state was soon heading into yet another drought. The Regional Water Quality Control Board now is considering wastewater-discharge permits for the plant not long after the state emerged from one of the most grueling droughts in our history.

Droughts certainly are a recurring challenge in our relatively arid state, but Californians tend to have short memories about them.

That's our concern after hearing some of the critiques of the company's ongoing proposal to turn seawater into drinking water. "It's really about, do we need to pollute the ocean right there, and do we need to pay that much money, all for water we don't need?" asked the head of an environmental group.

Any industrial facility produces some emissions, but the facility poses no serious pollution concerns. Environmental warnings about plankton depletion are much ado about

very little, given the, well, microscopic impact of the proposed desalter on the nearly limitless number of those tiny organisms in the Pacific Ocean. By the way, if the state OKs the facility, Poseidon will restore additional acres of Bolsa Chica wetlands. That's an environmental benefit.

The issue isn't about the environment, but about whether California has the foresight to plan for future shortages. Critics complain that desalinated water costs more than other water sources.

Nevertheless, the cost differential will compress over time as the price of imported water increases and as desalination benefits from technological advancements.

Desalination isn't designed to meet all of Orange County's water needs. It can, however, boost supply around the margins. With the latest drought over, it's too easy to overlook the necessity of building a reliable — and predictable — source of water. It bears repeating: Droughts are a permanent part of the California landscape.

The next hearing is Friday. We urge the water board to take the long view — and promptly provide Poseidon with the permits it needs.