

Letter to the Editor, the Cambrian—July 15

Aussie rates doubling

I strongly recommend that Cambrians read the July 11 New York Times article, "Arid Australia Sips Seawater, but at a Cost" (<http://nyti.ms/aeFqY4>). The more we know about the pros and cons of desalination, the better off we will be.

Some quotes from the article:

- "Many homeowners, angry about rising water bills, and environmentalists, wary of the plants' effect on the climate, call the projects energy-hungry white elephants. Stricter conservation measures, like mandating more efficient washing machines, would easily wring more water from existing supplies, critics say."
- "Almost every city which has implemented a desalination plant has nowhere near maxed out or used up their conservation potential,' said Stuart White, director of the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology, Sydney. 'Even without restrictions, cities could easily save 20 percent of their water,' Mr. White said."
- "For households in cities with the new plants, water bills are expected to double over the next four years, according to the Water Services Association."

Why, again, is Greg Sanders so sure rate increases from a Cambria plant will be "absolutely minimal"? They aren't anywhere else. In his letter to the editor (June 24, "Desal cost factors") Mr. Sanders backed his assertion with references to "federal assistance." But that money is not in the bank, and, in fact, seems to be teetering. He also says our plant will include a solar energy feature to offset the horrendous energy costs of desal. But will it? That's an extra \$4 million. Where is the extra four million coming from to build solar in a fog belt?

Here's another quote that jumped out at me from the NYT article: "... technical problems that temporarily shut down the plant recently"

We all know that Santa Barbara's desal plant is decommissioned. The Marina Coast Water District plant suffered erosion damage to its beach wells. The Morro Bay plant is undergoing a series of major renovations. Think those are anomalies? Google "Tugun plant," and read about "Rusting pipework, cracking concrete, faulty valves..." and "Experts ... crawling through pipes to pinpoint problems that the Government admits might not be fixed for months." Or Google the \$250 million Yuma plant: "It ran at one-third power when it opened briefly in 1992. Eight months later it closed, never to reopen, a victim of flood damage and engineering flaws."

And Tampa Bay! How can anyone use Tampa Bay as an example of a successful plant? It's had nothing but trouble. Read the article "More Problems for Tampa Bay Water Desalination Plant" and learn how dependable desal really — isn't (<http://bit.ly/9gDaq6>).

At the last CCSD meeting, Mr. Sanders said, "By any yardstick, Cambria is in an overbuilt condition." Yes, I know he meant in relation to our water resources. But consider this — If Cambria builds a desal plant, and then grows based on that promise of water, what we will do when our plant is too expensive to operate, or there's erosion damage to our beach wells? Or we experience any one of a number of technical problems?

How overbuilt will we be then?

All this to spare us getting more efficient washing machines and drought-resistant landscaping. Seems a bit like using an elephant gun to shoot a squirrel. Only more risky for us. As opposed to the squirrel.

Catherine Ryan Hyde

Cambria