

Desal cost concerns from Vance Hyde – Letter to the Editor in The Cambrian June 17 2010

At the recent North Coast Advisory Council meeting, Greg Sanders stated that rate increases as a result of desalination would be “negligible.” At the May CCSD meeting, he said twice that “impact on the rate payer will be absolutely minimal.” Meanwhile, the CCSD website quotes the estimated cost per acre foot of desal water at \$1,233.

At first, all those statements reassured me about my future water bills. But now I keep hearing about very different facts from other towns that have built desal plants.

I’m not an expert on desalination, but a simple web search revealed these disturbing contradictions: The CCSD has pointed to the Marina Coast Water District desalination plant as an example of a successful small plant. It is no longer in operation due to erosion damage to its beach wells, but when operating, it supplied water at four to five times the cost of groundwater pumping. (AMBAG Monterey Bay Regional Desalination Feasibility Study). Israeli communities raised water rates by as much as 36 percent after introducing desalination (Israel National News). In Monterey, Diana Brooks of the state Public Utilities Commission Division of Ratepayer Advocates is attempting to cap the cost of desalinated water at \$2,200 per acre-foot. But even proponents of the project estimate the cost per acre-foot cost would be about \$4,000. “Cal Am will pay about \$4,000 per acre-foot for water,” said Jim Heitzman, the district’s general manager (Monterey County Herald).

An analysis released by independent environmental scientist James Fryer estimates the cost of desalinated seawater in California will be \$2,000 to \$3,000 or more per acrefoot. Using cost data and production records from existing and proposed desalination plants and adjusting for California water conditions, current energy costs, financing costs, and other variables, the investigation found that there is no evidence to support cost projections by some desalination industry advocates of \$800 to \$1,000 per acrefoot (<http://r4rd.org/>). And, in a discussion with Greg Haas, Lois Capps’ assistant, he answered the question with a laugh. “Oh, your rates will go up,” he said.

Mr. Sanders, all Cambrians dread the shock of spiraling water bills. So will you please share with all Cambria rate-payers why you don’t feel desal will raise our water rates, even though rates have gone up wherever results have been studied? Why will our town be different, when so many communities that tried it have faced bitter disappointment? You seem to be the only one confident about this, so more details to explain your confidence would be much appreciated.

Vance Hyde Cambria

Read more: <http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2010/06/17/1181406/letters-to-the-editor-june-17.html?storylink=mirelated#ixzz0s4LXDSw3>