

Business Coalition sees progress on CDO extension, water supply project – but dangers ahead!!!

The Coalition of Peninsula Businesses worked hard - along with representatives of Monterey Peninsula Water Management District, Monterey Peninsula Regional Water Authority –to secure a five-year extension of the State Water Resources Control Board Cease and Desist Order on our water supply.

Several dozen supporters travelled to Sacramento to persuade the SWRCB directors to grant the Peninsula an extension to allow time for completion of our water supply project, which has been delayed almost half a dozen times for reasons beyond anyone's control.

The terms of the extension are fair but tight. We need to keep making progress on completion of our new water supply project to avoid harsh restrictions on our water supply that would hurt us all.

The Coalition continues to work with local officials and state water board staff to secure a reasonable interpretation of a poorly worded CDO Condition 2 that appears to stop all water reuse in spite of our community's tremendous overall water savings.

And how are we doing on getting our new water project approved?

The revised draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement was finally released in January and the Coalition filed comments on the draft by the March 29th review deadline. The Coalition continues to argue for a larger desal plant to allow for a more realistic and relaxed pumping regime for the desal modules (instead of requiring operation at an unrealistic 98% of capacity).

On the current schedule, we should see a certification of the final EIR/EIS by the end of the year with final Public Utilities Commission action on the required water supply project Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (essentially a PUC order to build the project).

All may not be roses, however. Several new parties have been allowed to intervene in the PUC proceedings and they argue that our water supply project irreparably will harm the Salinas Valley Groundwater Basin and interfere with municipal and ag water supplies. These new parties, along with other long-time local opponents of solving our water supply problem, may sue to invalidate the EIR/EIS.

The science supporting the water project and its EIR/EIS appears to be sound but who knows what a court might find.

Another fly in the ointment is this: two local groups, long-time water project obstructionists, are making plans to launch another untimely attempt to force a public buy-out of Cal Am. They are fueled by recent increases in water rates and naturally claim public ownership would be cheaper. Their erroneous claims failed several times before but because of recent water rate increases, this time they may succeed. This has the potential to completely derail progress on the water supply project and trigger immediate imposition of the draconian water cutbacks of the Cease and Desist Order. The timing of this could not be worse! But then, maybe that's exactly what these obstructionists want?