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WEST BASIN TO TERMINATE OCEAN WATER DESALINATION PROJECT

Changing water resources portfolio and District strategic plans key factors in decision

CARSON, Calif. – The West Basin Municipal Water District (West Basin) Board of Directors voted today to terminate the district’s proposed Ocean Water Desalination Project, which would include a facility in El Segundo capable of producing approximately 20 million gallons per day of drinking water.

West Basin Board President Harold C. Williams, P.E., MSCE, stated, “As a Board, we have supported and appreciated the research, contributions and leadership that the District has shown in the study of ocean water desalination. However, at this time, for West Basin, the Board has decided to forego further pursuit of the proposed Ocean Water Desalination Project. Given the changing water landscape since the program’s inception and updated strategic plans to pursue projects which enhance recycled water management, expand water efficiency programs, and increase regional collaboration, the Board has chosen to focus its efforts in these areas in 2022 and beyond.”

Following a staff presentation about the project considerations to date, the Board assessed how local water supply conditions have evolved in the last 20 years since West Basin began exploring seawater desalination. Some of the key factors that were taken into consideration include:

- Expansion of a water recycling framework toward reuse for drinking water, including groundwater augmentation to replenish groundwater basins with sustainable recycled water
- Projected increase in groundwater use locally by retail suppliers
- Increased water use efficiency standards statewide
- Sustained reductions in demand for potable water supplies in the service area since 2000

Part of the Board’s discussion centered around the agency’s recently approved 2020 Urban Water Management Plan, which did not include ocean water desalination as a projected supply over the next 25 years. Despite not including desalination, West Basin’s overall water supply portfolio was deemed to be reliable through 2045 in normal and dry years due to West Basin’s continued investments in recycled water projects and water efficiency programs, as well as the continued reliability of Metropolitan Water District’s imported water supplies.

During the meeting, Board members and members of the public expressed their appreciation for all of the valuable research and investments that have been made by West Basin to date to evaluate ocean desalination as a reliable local water source. Following extensive Board discussion and public comment, the Board ultimately decided, on a 3-2 vote, to terminate its pursuit of ocean water desalination and to focus its efforts on working with its many partners throughout the region to continue expanding recycled water supplies, while also ensuring that local communities continue to emphasize making conservation and water efficiency efforts a normal way of life.

Since the early 1990s, West Basin has been at the forefront of the development of reliable local supplies that are able to withstand climate-induced shortages, and that offset a need for less reliable imported water from the oversubscribed Colorado River and the environmentally sensitive Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta.

For nearly 20 years, starting with a pilot project in 2002, the District has carefully considered how to responsibly provide desalinated ocean water to the service area and region. As a coastal water agency with viable technology, regulations, and sites for an ocean water desalination facility, West Basin has investigated how to produce a new, drought-proof drinking water supply in a cost-effective, transparent, and environmentally responsible manner.

Through the District's technical and environmental studies of ocean water desalination, West Basin has contributed valuable data that has informed California regulations including the Ocean Plan desalination amendment (2015) which addresses effects associated with the construction and operation of seawater desalination facilities. In addition, West Basin has provided public education on the technology and local potential for this supply in a region facing recurring droughts, climate change and other water supply challenges.

In 2019, after the review and approval of the Project's Environmental Impact Report, the Project entered an evaluation phase based on the conditions set forth by the Board at that time. Staff then developed financial estimates and analysis to further project decision making. In August 2021, West Basin released a Cost-Benefit Analysis of implementing the Project. The report analyzed estimated costs, rate impacts and affordability, among other topics.

Following the vote to terminate the project, Board President Williams added, "West Basin is committed to improving water reliability for its customer agencies and communities, at present and in the future, and during this drought and droughts yet to come. The Board and District will continue to focus its efforts on protecting the District's existing water supply, augmenting and enhancing the West Basin recycled water program, and innovating to prepare for a secure water future."

For more information about West Basin's water supply programs and long-term planning efforts, please visit www.westbasin.org.

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West Basin Municipal Water District (West Basin) is a wholesale water agency that serves nearly one million people in 17 cities and unincorporated areas in Los Angeles County. West Basin provides imported drinking water, recycled water, as well as conservation and education programs. Through its Water for Tomorrow Program, West Basin is committed to protecting, diversifying, and securing our water supply for the future while continuing a history of innovation and industry leadership. Visit www.westbasin.org to learn more.