

Calif. lawmaker floats bill to fund desalination efforts

Anne C. Mulkern, Environment & Energy Publishing, 7-28-11

Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-Calif.) yesterday offered legislation that would fund research into ways to turn sea water into drinkable water.

Napolitano authored H.R. 2664, which would reauthorize the Desalination Act of 1996 and allocate \$2 million per year through 2016. That law has funded projects or studies in more than half of the 50 states, Napolitano's office said. In California, which has been beset by droughts, there have been 38 projects since 1996.

"Desalination is another promising source of water, especially for Western states, and these programs deserve federal support," Napolitano said in a statement. "If we can continue to perfect the technologies and bring down the cost of producing new water from the ocean, we will have a reliable, drought-proof source of water and a powerful engine for economic growth.

"The desalination projects previously funded by these programs have delivered new discoveries since they began in 1996, and they will continue to improve desalination if given proper support," she added.

Discoveries under the federal research program include "determining how to dispose of saline wastewater, establishing uniform industry standards for common desalination components, funding 'brackish' water projects to desalinate ground water, discovering how to withdraw sea water from below the sea floor to minimize environmental damage, and developing reverse osmosis membrane pretreatment to improve desalination," Napolitano's office said.

Currently there are plans at the local level to build desalination plants in multiple California locations. Desalination is controversial, however, because of concerns about how it affects marine life.