

Drip, drip, drip goes the desalination plant permit process

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Poseidon Water reapplied last week for a coastal development permit with the California Coastal Commission, putting the proposed desalination plant in Huntington Beach one permit away from reality.

The company withdrew its application in 2013 when the commission demanded a potentially more fish-friendly subsurface intake system be considered over the proposed open ocean intake system. Two expert panels and nearly 20 months later, the panels found that, while a subsurface system was technically feasible, it was also economically infeasible.

The new application is relatively unchanged, with some minor revisions following new state water board amendments in May.

But the dozen environmental groups who have been fighting the desalination plant for years are unswayed. They're demanding a third expert study, to investigate the economic feasibility of a subsurface intake system at other locations.

Although in reality, it seems they'd simply prefer it not be built at all.

"We don't need the water now or any time in the future," Ray Hiemstra, the associate director of programs for the Orange County Coastkeeper, said when noting that mandatory state cutbacks have conserved more water than Poseidon could produce.

But rather than subscribe to environmental Luddism, these pages saw that first-ever mandatory cutback as a harbinger of things to come, requiring an all-of-the-above water strategy.

In drought-prone California, no forward-thinker would rule out the near-future 50 million gallons per day of potable water – roughly 8 percent of the county's water needs and enough for 300,000 O.C. residents.

The Coastal Commission has 90 days to respond to Poseidon's request. We hope they are forward thinkers, too.