



Media Release

State outlines pathway for more efficient permitting of coastal desalination plants

Streamlining criteria part of state's multipronged Water Supply Strategy

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SACRAMENTO – This week, state agencies finalized the “[Siting and Streamlining Report to Expedite Permitting Seawater Desalination Projects](#),” further bolstering the Newsom Administration’s all-of-the-above approach to boosting California’s water resilience amid climate change impacts. Hotter and drier weather conditions spurred by climate change could reduce California’s water supply by up to 10% by the year 2040.

To help shore up California’s water supply while protecting coastal marine environments, the report, led by the State Water Resources Control Board, establishes criteria developed by multiple state permitting entities for the efficient and timely approval of coastal desalination projects. To protect the marine environment, projects must meet [Ocean Plan](#) waste discharge requirements in order to be eligible for streamlining.

In addition to the State Water Board, six coastal regional water quality control boards, the California Natural Resources Agency, Coastal Commission, Department of Water Resources, Ocean Protection Council, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and State Lands Commission, among others, participated in the Desalination Interagency Group that produced the report.

“Interagency consensus on the criteria and process in the final report allows for permitting approvals to be more efficient, while continuing to provide protections for marine life under existing regulations,” said Jonathan Bishop, chief deputy director with the board. “Only coastal desalination projects that utilize the most advanced technology and protections for the marine environment and meet the waste discharge requirements set forth in the [Ocean Plan](#) are eligible for more efficient processing.”

The approval of the final report, following a public comment period, allows permitting agencies to simultaneously review applications that meet all the following conditions. To qualify for more efficient review, a project application must:



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

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- Consider reasonably foreseeable coastal hazards resulting from climate change, sea-level rise, or geologic or seismic hazards;
- Use subsurface intake designs that exclusively withdraw seawater or improve seawater intrusion conditions; and
- Demonstrate engagement with tribes and communities affected by the proposed project.

In August 2022, Gov. Gavin Newsom's [Water Supply Strategy](#) directed agencies to take key actions to bolster the state's water resilience amid intensifying climate impacts.

Desalination, both brackish and seawater, is in of a suite of approaches—including conservation, recycling water, and increasing storage and stormwater use and capture—that the state is advancing to strengthen and diversify the state's water supplies, especially during drought.

More [information](#) about seawater desalination and the California Ocean Plan can be found on the board's website.

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper water allocation for present and future generations.