

Desalination is not the solution

THE Marin Municipal Water District board's approval of the environmental report clears the way for construction of a 15 million gallon-per-day desalination plant just north of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, close to the Marin Rod and Gun Club.

Comprehensive examination of desalination's impact on our way of life is overdue. Consciously choosing the best solution is imperative.

MMWD claims desalination can purify bay water, which is laden with pharmaceuticals, pesticides and chemicals, including 11 million gallons of treated sewage that the Central Marin Sanitary Agency dumps daily into the bay, not far from the Rod and Gun Club pier and the intended location of the desalination intake pipe.

We live in a water-limited place. MMWD's decision disregards the financial, environmental and health costs of desalination.

Desalination would corporatize our future. Marin's economy won't benefit — but a parade of out-of-county corporations, consultants and attorneys will. Desalination's ultimate price tag of \$400 million over 30 years would perpetuate the capital- and energy-intensive technology that has brought our planet to the brink of environmental collapse. It would also discourage the array of emerging conservation strategies for the management of our reservoirs and pipes and the use of water in our homes and businesses.

Such strategies could employ hundreds of local trades-people and residents.

Already the county's largest user of electrical power, operation of the reverse-osmosis desalination plant could ultimately qua-

**FORD GREENE
LAWRENCE BRAGMAN**

Ford Greene is a member of the San Anselmo Town Council. Lawrence Bragman is a Fairfax Town Council member.

druple MMWD's current usage. It would contribute to the very climate change that threatens our future.

The process would cause unknown impacts on local fisheries from the massive water extraction at its intake, to the discharge of its fluid waste mixed with treated sewage.

When the solid waste that remains is trucked and dumped at the Redwood Landfill in Novato, it's likely to leach back into the bay.

By both means, desalination waste would re-enter the bay in a closed loop of recirculating toxins.

Finally, mixing desalinated fluid with our reservoirs' pure rainwater would dramatically degrade the quality of drinking water we enjoy every day. There is no assurance that desalination would adequately cleanse the chemical and biological soup it draws from in order to prevent harmful, long term, consequences to human health.

Some desalination proponents justify its costs by claiming that Marin must fulfill an "obligation" to build almost 14,000 new housing units commanded by the Association of Bay Area Governments. But those claims ignore ABAG's questionable legal authority to enforce its quotas in light of our actual environmental limitations. Do we really want to commit millions of ratepayer dollars to subsidize further develop-

ment and congestion?

By building and supplying a huge bayside facility within range of rising sea levels, by installing three 2-million gallon mixing tanks at open space areas in San Quentin and Tiburon, and by constructing the connecting pipelines, desalination will change the face of Marin forever.

Instead of exercising its authority to protect our quality of life by limiting growth and rapidly implementing state-of-the-art conservation measures, MMWD chooses to impose on us a desalination "project" that will scar Marin's unparalleled beauty, habitat and natural diversity.

Its toilet-to-tap approach would contaminate the water we drink.

A decision of such profound consequence requires democratic respect. Such decision must be approved by a vote of the people, a vote which MMWD has thus far sidestepped.

Desalination is no solution. We can live and prosper within the limitations of our Mediterranean climate.

The money that MMWD will commit to a desalination mega-project would be better invested in existing infrastructure and conservation. Investment of ratepayer funds to increase efficiency, the use of native plants, grey-water reuse and rainwater catchment would promote a sustainable local economy which would also preserve the beauty and productivity of our environment, particularly our water.

Proponents and skeptics alike must carefully and openly face all the issues the big picture presents. Together, we must stop harming our planet and help our county thrive.