

Poseidon Goes Down

Rejection of desal done wrong is a huge win for the California coast



#StopPoseidon Coalition

The 'Stop Poseidon' coalition, made up of environmental justice, coastal and ocean conservation groups, went before the California Coastal Commission on May 12, alongside more than 300 in-person attendees, to argue in opposition to the Brookfield-Poseidon Desalination Plant proposed for Huntington Beach. They did so despite enormous political pressure for approval that was brought to bear on each commissioner.

“The Coastal Commissioners deserve tremendous credit for following the law and protecting the coast from this terrible special interest project,” said Susan Jordan, executive director of the California Coastal Protection Network and member of the Stop Poseidon coalition. “Poseidon would have killed more than five billion small ocean animals, overcharged ratepayers by more than \$1 billion, and failed to provide increased water supplies where they are needed. Thank goodness for the Coastal Act and the dedication of California’s Coastal Commissioners.”

The vote followed the Coastal Commission’s staff recommendation for denial. Mid-morning during the hearing, staff detailed the Commission’s own Coastal Act Environmental Justice policy, noting communities have not been meaningfully engaged in the process because Poseidon does not have a water buyer and hasn’t communicated with the communities in 22 cities, two-thirds of which are “communities of concern.” Commissioner Chair Donne Brownsey also lambasted Poseidon for producing a confusing report that was submitted overnight, after the public document submission deadline, that made a recommendation to approve the project using the Commission’s letterhead and font.

Staff noted during the hearing that 1.8 million low-income rate payers could be impacted by higher rates and a number of injustices. The floor was then opened to presentations and public comments, which proceeded to detail the injustices and avoidable consequences of the proposed plant.

“Today was a good day, it’s a day where the Elders of our community truly felt that they have been heard and considered in a space where they have not been in the past,” said Frankie Orona of the Society of Native Nations, Environmental liaison for Chief Anthony Morales of the Gabrieleno Tongva Tribe of the San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians. “Thank you to the California Coastal Commission and its staff for supporting us in stopping and denying the Poseidon Desalination Project permit request.”

“The Coastal Commission’s vote to deny the Brookfield-Poseidon project coastal development permits sends a clear message that the Commission will do what is right to protect sensitive communities and habitats in California,” said Andrea León-Grossmann, director of Climate Action at Azul. “Californians are all greener and healthier for this decision, and Azul encourages the legislature and agencies to focus on water conservation, efficiency, reuse, and recycling, while also developing mitigation and adaptation plans for climate change and sea-level rise. The proposed desal plant was fossil-fuel burning, obsolete technology, with a carbon footprint the size of 40,000 homes, that would have killed marine life year-round, costing taxpayers and ratepayers alike. Today, the commission showed the environmental justice laws of the state of California and the environmental justice policy of the Commission itself are not just words on a page, but living, breathing pledges to do what is right, despite the political pressure.”