

## **EDITORIAL**

### **DE-SALTING THE PACIFIC**

*Water Department's new techniques should add to supplies, carefully.*

**Sunday, April 17, 2005** - Long Beach's Water Department already has come up with an innovative way to make seawater drinkable at a lower cost. Now the challenge is to make the process friendly to sea creatures.

Two state grants, approved last week, should help make that possible. The first, for \$1 million, will go toward completing a prototype desalination plant near the Haynes Generating Station in East Long Beach. The second, for \$2 million, will be used to test a new way to collect seawater without destroying fish eggs and small organisms.

This is done by drawing seawater into perforated pipes buried beneath the sand, which acts as a filter to protect tiny sea life. Brackish byproducts can be returned the same way, minimizing any negative impact.

Long Beach, despite its location alongside Earth's biggest body of water, depends on piped-in imports for much of its fresh water. Like the rest of Southern California, it can't be sure there always will be enough to go around.

Desalination, if done cost-effectively, could relieve some of that uncertainty. What the Long Beach Water Department intends to demonstrate is that its system of two-stage reverse osmosis filtering uses 20 to 30 percent less electricity than other systems that make seawater drinkable.

Long Beach Water Department could have just gone about its business without taking on the larger problems of an entire region. But it stepped out, devised an improved way to cope with water shortages, attracted grants to fund the research, is building the prototype and soon should have a desalination system that is economically feasible and environmentally sound.

That's delivering more than the already high expectation of a predictable supply of inexpensive, pure water. And for that, Long Beach residents owe the department another round of thanks.