

Overview on the heated debate about solving sydney's water crisis by opening kurn...

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There has been large debate within the community of Sutherland Shire Council concerning the proposed desalination plant at Kurnell. The government has announced that this plant will be built to solve Sydney's current water crisis, however this comes at a heavy price. The \$2 billion project will not only cost the government but it will also raise the water bill for Sydney households. There are many arguments both for and against this proposed plant and it simply comes down to the question "which one is more important?" The desalination plant uses a process called reverse osmosis. Sea water is pushed through a fine mesh to filter out the salt resulting in fresh water. It is estimated that the plant will convert 500 megalitres of drinkable water each day during a drought which will supply water for 1.4 million people (a third of Sydney's population). This will assure that during drought season, Sydney's water supply will not be undermined. The desalination plant will also be in use in non-drought periods, producing 125 million litres of water per day. However this mass desalination of water involves many negative consequences. It is argued that this desalination plant is environmentally and financially unsound. A plant as large as this would require 900 gig watt hours of electricity each year. This would result in a significantly higher output of carbon dioxide emissions which are a main contributor to global warming which in turn is contributing to the water crisis. The energy used in this plant is equivalent to the energy use of 120,000 households. The plant would also produce concentrated salt residue and hot brine which will be dumped into the ocean damaging the marine habitats. Marine life will also be at risk of being sucked into the massive pipes with

approximately 78, 000 fish and 52, 000 invertebrates being impinged each year.

There are three potential areas as to where the desalination plant will be built. It was decided that it will be built alongside Caltex Oil Refinery within the industrial area adjacent to the Captain Cook Landing Place Historic Site.

In 2005, Sydney had been facing a severe water crisis and alternative methods were needed for water conservation. The New South Wales government then released a Metropolitan Water Plan for securing Sydney's long-term water supply. In this Water Plan, there had been a proposition for the building of a desalination plant at Kurnell. However the plan had received strong negative feedback from the local community of southern Sydney. The government then released a progress report on the Metropolitan Plan in February 2006 stating that Sydney's water supply is still secure without the establishment of the desalination plant for the time being. However once the dam storage levels reach below 30 percent, the construction of a desalination plant could be built almost immediately. This has raised some concern among the members against the plant proposal with the members of the Sutherland Shire Council working hard to fight against this plan. The current NSW Premier, Morris Iemma has taken a stand on desalination claiming " the plant will be built, drought or no drought". An Environmental Assessment has been undertaken by the government to ensure that the plant does not cause any serious effects to the environment. However this information has not been fully disclosed and some effects of this desalination plant are still undetermined. At the moment, the proposal of the desalination plant at Kurnell has been put on hold until Sydney's water supply is in <https://assignbuster.com/overview-on-the-heated-debate-about-solving-sydneys-water-crisis-by-opening-kurnells-desalination-plant/>

desperate need of water, and then the desalination plant will be used as a last resort.

With an issue as topical as the construction of a large scale desalination plant, there have certainly been a large variety of groups involved. A planning focus meeting was held by the Department of Planning in August 2005 allowing representatives from engaging groups to discuss their viewpoints on the topic. The groups present were the Department of Planning, Sydney Water Corp., Department of Environment and Conservation, Energy Australia, Sutherland Shire Council and Department of Environment and Heritage. The NSW Government (the proposer of the desalination plant) is in favour of the construction of the plant, stating its significant contribution to Sydney's water and securing the future water supply. The NSW government may also be following the in the lead of Western Australia's Government who have also planned to utilize desalination by 2007. Other groups in favour of the desalination projects include Sydney Water, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure and Energy Australia. All these groups share a similar idea of the positive contribution the plant will have to Sydney's water with a hopeful attitude towards the methods used to make the plant more ecologically friendly. The groups arguing against the project however are doubtful in these promises. The groups involved that are against desalination are the Sutherland Shire Council, SCUD (Sydney Community United against Desalination), Department of Environment and Conservation and the Department of Environment and Heritage. These groups are more concerned with the detrimental effects the plant will have on the environment and marine, particularly on a site as

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fragile as Botany Bay. The adjacent Captain Cook Landing Place Historic Site plays a prominent role in the heritage of Australia's history and the desalination project will damage its location. The groups persisting against this proposition have strong views in the well being of the environment and the members of the community in Kurnell. They believe that the desalination plant will have a higher rate of negative impacts to Kurnell and the environment than the actual contribution it will make to Sydney's water supply.

The NSW Government's Metropolitan Water Plan of 2006 has outlined steps as to what decisions and actions have to be made to ensure that if the dam storage levels do drop below 30%, Sydney Water will be ready to commence construction. The Environmental Assessment must be completed and approved in order to begin planning. Calls for expressions of interest must be taken by engineering firms to develop a blue print and then the sea water off Kurnell must be tested. This will allow the government to be fully prepared to launch into construction once the water situation is appropriate.

The Southern Shire Council and the NSW government must come to terms. Reports have been taken that the State Government have demonstrated a lack of clarity in their decision continuing to avoid community consultation concerning desalination by refusing to host a public meeting for residents of Sutherland Shire. One of the Sutherland Shire aims is to have a meeting with the State Government and receive an explanation on what their plans are while also expressing their own view point. After mass protest campaigns and proposition papers, the Sutherland Shire Council and The NSW

government have to both decide together what is best for the area of Kurnell and Sydney's water supply.

The NSW Government and its supporters of the desalination plant have held back their proposal of constructing the plant at Kurnell agreeing they will wait until Sydney's dam levels reach below 30%. They were not entirely defeated in this debate against the Sutherland Shire Council, as they are putting their project on hold. It was decided that once the water situation is appropriate they can begin construction almost immediately. Although there still is a chance that the desalination plant could still be built, this shows that when community members unite to fight a cause for their local area it can in fact influence the higher powers and in this case, the State government. The Shire Council had struggled passionately to conserve and defend their community, their environment, the marine life and the conservation of one of Australia's most historical sites. Although not a certainty, the Sutherland Shire has fought successfully against the proposal and power of the State Government and has achieved social justice and equity. However Sydney's overall need for the conservation of water has not been solved. An alternative method must still be acknowledged for future water concerns. Although the Sutherland Shire has effectively defended their community and national heritage, the initial problem of the dam water storage level has not yet been fixed. The NSW government has placed the proposition of the desalination plant aside for the time being, and is still searching for a more popular alternative solution.