



# Surfrider Foundation®

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## At what price Coolangatta Bay?

Media Release

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The desalination plant to be built on the Gold Coast is all but signed, sealed and delivered. The 125 million litre per day plant, which will service the Gold Coast and South East Queensland is slated to come online in approximately two years.

Last night at a public information evening, the community heard a description of the project from Shaun Cox, the director of Gold Coast Water and from Ted Brambleby, a marine ecologist who described the plant's potential impacts on the marine ecosystem of Coolangatta Bay.

Desalination is one of a number of options that Council is investigating as a source of water supply for the Gold Coast. Tom Alletson, the Gold Coast Beach Representative for Surfrider Foundation believes that both Council and the State Government have been soft on the issue of indirect potable reuse, a process whereby water is purified, and then returned to the city's water source, before once again being treated through the existing potable supply system. "With only 1% of the planet's water suitable for drinking and Australia the earth's driest continent, we simply can't afford to throw water away through ocean outfalls. Indirect potable reuse is being used all over the world, is happening in an unplanned fashion without harm in many Australian communities, and should also be mandated on the Gold Coast," said Alletson.

Although the decision to go ahead with the plant will be made in November, the decision on energy supply is still under consideration. Gold Coast City Council is investigating options for using 100% renewable energy to power the plant. Surfrider Foundation believes this is essential to offset the major greenhouse gas emissions that will be created by the operation of the plant. "Investment in clean, green technology will help the Gold Coast maintain its image as a sustainable city. We expect Council to fully endorse the use of 100% renewable energy sources to run this plant," said Mr Stuart Ball, Managing Director of Surfrider Foundation.

However, securing a new water supply for the Gold Coast presents a substantial risk to the marine environment. Ted Brambleby expressed the concerns of many in the crowd who believe that the desalination project's baseline environmental monitoring program is inadequate and that impact assessments are being rushed. The potential consequences for marine life, water quality and recreational amenity in Coolangatta Bay are unknown.

"We understand the need to have an emergency water supply but it is unprecedented in this day and age to be undertaking community consultation and environmental monitoring while the site is being prepared and the designs have not yet been finalised," said Mr Ball. "It's completely inappropriate to hide behind the legislation on this project. More must be done to inform the community about the environmental consequences of this project, as its social acceptability was gauged by Council without the community knowing its true costs. More importantly, the pursuit of resource conservation through indirect potable reuse must be paramount, and this cannot be achieved without effective consultation and education," said Mr Ball.

The community agreed to a much smaller desalination plant being built in 2025 with far superior technology. There is no community mandate and there has been no community education about the impacts of a project three times the size to be built 20 years ahead of schedule. It appears that the decision to pursue desalination over indirect potable reuse was political, rather than technical and the outcome has been an engineering fix, rather than a social solution. "This strategy is neither adaptable nor diverse and it is definitely not balanced in a manner that considers the environment and future generations," said Alletson.

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