



GENE BREGMAN & ASSOCIATES  
*Public Opinion & Marketing Research*

DRAFT MEMORANDUM

To: Bill Kocher, Water Director  
Santa Cruz Water Department

From: Gene Bregman  
Gene Bregman & Associates

Date: December 21, 2010

Re: Public Opinion Survey

This memo presents the main findings from a telephone study conducted by Gene Bregman & Associates on behalf of the City of Santa Cruz Water Department. A total of 300 voters who reside in the City were interviewed from November 12-14, 2010. A survey of this size has a margin of error ranging from +/- 3.4% to +/- 5.6%, depending on response levels to a particular question.

**1. In general, between two-thirds and three-fourths of the voters see two local water problems as the most serious ones facing the city:**

- Inadequate water supplies for our future needs
- Keeping our water supplies safe and secure

**2. Most voters in the City of Santa Cruz feel that building a desalination plant is a good idea.** When first asked about the plant, 54 percent said the plant was either an "excellent idea" or a "good idea" with just 30 percent saying it was "not too good an idea" or a "poor" idea. After hearing reasons that supporters and opponents of the plant give for their opinions, the positive opinions increased more than the negative ones, with 58 percent having a positive opinion of the plant and 32 percent having a negative opinion.

**3. The main reasons to support the plant are related to water supplies and the safety and cleanliness of the water.** Some of these reasons are as follows:



- The City of Santa Cruz has not added to its water supplies in over 30 years, while the population has increased by about 50 percent
  - A desalination plant will better protect the health and safety of the community and provide a more reliable source of water than any other feasible option to increase water supplies
  - During severe droughts, the City of Santa Cruz Water Department could be as much as 45 percent short of meeting today's water needs
  - Desalination is being successfully used in over 120 countries, here in California, and in other places with limited water supplies
  - More groundwater is being pumped out every year than is being replenished by rainfall
  - Desalination produces water that is cleaner and has fewer contaminants than water from local rivers and reservoirs
4. **Voters' main concerns about the plant are related to how the plant will affect their water bills and possible environmental effects.** Some people are particularly worried about possible effects on marine life and marine habitats and some want to be sure that all other options have been exhausted before a desalination plant is built.
5. **Voters like living here.** In fact, 88 percent said Santa Cruz County was an "excellent" or a "good" place to live. Just 3 percent said it was a "poor" place to live.
6. **Similarly, opinions of the City of Santa Cruz Water Department are very positive.** About two-thirds of the people (67 percent) said the District is doing an "excellent" or "good" job, while just 5 percent said it was doing a "poor" job.
7. **A large majority (70 percent) agree that they "have already cut back on water use for my home as much as I can; there's not much more I can do to save water."** Less than one-third (30 percent)



disagreed with this statement.

8. **Although most said they had cut back as much as they can, voters were evenly divided on whether we need to find new sources of water to solve our long-term water supply problems (45 percent) or if using less will solve those problems (47 percent).**
9. **About two-thirds of these voters (68 percent) had heard about the desalination plant proposal.** More people said they had at least some knowledge of the plant (39 percent) as said they either knew only a little or had "just heard of it" (29 percent).

In short, with a favorable opinion of the Santa Cruz Water Department, residents are favorable towards the District building a desalination plant that they will share with the Soquel Creek Water District during drought years. They recognize that the City's water supplies have not increased to match the increased population over the past 30 years, that the City could fall drastically short of its needs during a severe drought, and that desalination is proving to be a safe way to assure adequate future water supplies. While some are understandably concerned about how the plant will affect their water bills, most see the need for the plant.