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Mayor urged to amend repurified-water stand

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Frustrated by San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders' opposition to replenishing city reservoirs with repurified wastewater, representatives from several government agencies yesterday asked him to reconsider.

Members of the Metro Wastewater Joint Powers Authority unanimously voted to encourage Sanders to join them in expanding water reuse in San Diego instead of rejecting a controversial – but potentially important – water source.

Coalition members share San Diego's wastewater facilities and pay part of their upkeep.

“We, again, invite you to join us in education and understanding with a sense of leadership rather than reluctance in the face of sloganeering,” said the letter, approved during a meeting in San Diego.

Two weeks ago, Sanders announced his opposition to reservoir augmentation, which became known as “toilet to tap” before the City Council killed the idea in the late 1990s. Sanders didn't challenge the science or safety of water repurification. Instead, he said the issue had been settled and that the public didn't want to debate it again.

A recently completed city report on water-reuse strategies in San Diego showed that reservoir augmentation is a leading method for creating a local drought-proof water supply. The study, which cost the city about \$1 million, was part of a two-year effort to investigate ways to reduce the amount of partly treated wastewater that San Diego spills into the ocean.

The City Council is expected to consider reuse this fall. Some members, including Council President Scott Peters, have enthusiastically supported

reservoir augmentation. Others have said they're concerned about its cost and public acceptance.

A spokesman for Sanders said yesterday that the mayor wouldn't comment on the letter because he hadn't seen it. He indicated no change in Sanders' thinking on the topic.

“The mayor's position is clear,” spokesman Bill Harris said.

Members of the Joint Powers Authority are hoping Sanders' position will soften if he's reminded that other politicians accept reservoir augmentation as a primary tool for reducing the region's reliance on imported water. San Diego imports about 85 percent of its water, and overall water demand is expected to rise 25 percent by 2030

The authority supports putting repurified water into the city's San Vicente Reservoir near Lakeside. There, it would mix with river water and be treated again before being piped throughout the city.

Mayda Winter, authority vice chairwoman and an Imperial Beach councilwoman, said the letter was intended to prevent reservoir augmentation from being dismissed prematurely.

“We have spent lots of time educating ourselves on the process of water reuse and understanding it has led to our support,” she said.

At yesterday's meeting, Poway Councilwoman Merrilee Boyack urged her counterparts to publicize their position in hopes of generating broader acceptance of reservoir augmentation.

“Part of the pressure that needs to be put on Mayor Sanders is public because that seems to be what he is responding to,” she said.

Metro Wastewater Joint Powers Authority

■**What:** A coalition of municipalities and special districts that share the use of San Diego's wastewater facilities.

■**Formed:** January 2001.

■**Purpose:** To give a strong voice in the operation of San Diego's sewer system to the municipalities and districts outside the city. Together, the authority's members pay for about one-third of the sewer system's upkeep.

■**Members:** Coronado, Del Mar, El Cajon, Imperial Beach, National City, La Mesa, Lemon Grove, Poway, the county, and the Otay and Padre Dam water districts.

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