



El Toro Water District

"A District of Distinction"

Serving the Public – Respecting the Environment

August 22, 2024

Board of Directors

Mark L. Monin
President

Mike Gaskins
Vice President

Kathryn Freshley
Director

Kay Havens
Director

Fred Adjarian
Director

General Manager

Dennis P. Cafferty

The Honorable Maria Hernandez
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of California
700 Civic Center Drive west
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Responses to the Orange County Grand Jury Report "*Emerging Opportunities in South County Water/Wastewater Systems*"

Dear Presiding Judge Hernandez,

On June 21 2024, the Orange County Grand Jury released a report titled "*Emerging Opportunities in South County Water/Wastewater Systems*" (Report). This Report requested that El Toro Water District (District) respond to findings and recommendations contained in the Report. The District appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback and comments on the Orange County Grand Jury Report. The District recognizes and similarly appreciates the efforts made by the Grand Jury to evaluate the important issues of water and wastewater service in Orange County.

The El Toro Water District provides water, wastewater and recycled water service to over 50,000 residents in portions of the cities of Aliso Viejo, Laguna Hills, Lake Forest, Mission Viejo and all of the City of Laguna Woods.

The District owns and operates its own Water Recycling Plant which provides full secondary treatment of wastewater generated within the District service area as well as tertiary treatment to make beneficial use of the treated effluent to supply the District's recycled water distribution system for use in landscape irrigation. The District is a longstanding member agency of the South Orange County Wastewater Authority (SOCWA) at which the District owns capacity in the solids handling facilities at the Regional Treatment Plant and in the Aliso Creek Ocean Outfall. The District remains an active member of SOCWA with representation on the SOCWA Board of Directors as well as on the SOCWA Finance and Engineering Committees.

Per the Orange County Grand Jury's request, and in accordance with Penal Code 933.05, below are the District's responses to each of the Findings and Recommendations outlined in the Report for which the District was requested to respond.

El Toro Water District

FINDINGS

Finding F3: *SOCWA's member agencies have widely diverse populations, requirements, and revenues. This has led to conflicts over governance, facility operation, and control, affecting the evolving potential for wastewater reuse.*

The District disagrees partially with this Finding.

The District agrees with portions of this Finding. The seven SOCWA member agencies represent cities and special districts, coast communities and inland communities, large agencies and smaller agencies all with diverse populations, requirements and revenues.

While there have been conflicts within SOCWA, there are also many examples of collaborative efforts to the mutual benefit of the member agencies.

The evolution of wastewater reuse in South Orange County remains strong. The majority of the SOCWA member agencies operate recycled water systems. The discussion regarding potential further reuse projects at the current SOCWA plants continue.

Finding F4: *There is currently no unified strategy for the future of water/wastewater provision in South Orange County.*

The District disagrees partially with this Finding.

While the unique characteristics of each service area impact the individual strategy for water supply and wastewater service, the South Orange County agencies have a long history of collaboration on multiple projects. Each agency makes diligent efforts to ensure the provision of reliable service to its customers in the most efficient means possible. As the South Orange County agencies look to the future of water/wastewater provision, there exists quite a bit of collaboration, sharing of ideas and work towards regional projects that might have mutual benefits.

Recommendation R2: *The OCGJ recommends that by January 1, 2025, LAFCO form a task force comprising representatives of affected water agencies to study the transformation of SOCWA and prepare a report on the future of water/wastewater in South Orange County. (F3, F4)*

The recommendation will not be implemented

The recommendation suggests action by LAFCO that is not within the purview of the El Toro Water District.

El Toro Water District

The District notes, however, that the suggested “*task force comprising representatives of affected water agencies*” already exists. Representatives of each SOCWA member agency meet, typically three times each month, at SOCWA Board meetings, Finance Committee meetings and Engineering Committee meetings.

In addition, the SOCWA member agencies have continued to hold extremely productive meetings regarding the potential transformation of SOCWA. Those meetings and that process should continue to its conclusion before engaging in a further external process.

The District, once again, appreciates the efforts of the Grand Jury and the opportunity to provide responses to the Findings and Recommendations of the Report.

Sincerely,

EL TORO WATER DISTRICT



Mark Monin
President