



# PORT ARANSAS SOUTH JETTY

Weekly Newspaper Covering Port Aransas and Mustang Island, Texas

Thursday, August 2, 2018



## Please hold the salt

Bujan: Desal plant must not harm sealife

| August 01, 2018

Dan Parker  
News editor



Port Aransas Mayor Charles Bujan listens as a citizen speaks at a city council meeting on Monday, July 30.

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2018-08-02 E-Edition

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Port Aransas Mayor Charles Bujan said the city will fight the Port of Corpus Christi Authority's plans related to a proposed desalination plant on Harbor Island.

Bujan made the remarks at a special city council meeting on Monday, July 30.

"I'm not going to back down until I operate and play every card we have to make sure this does not happen, and if it does happen, that it's done the right way," Bujan said.

The right way, he said, will be to make sure the plant's water intake and discharge outfalls are located a good distance out in the Gulf of Mexico. The idea is to avoid harming sea life in environmentally sensitive Port Aransas waters, Bujan said.

The Port of Corpus Christi Authority has applied to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) for a permit to discharge brine from a desalination plant into the Corpus Christi Ship Channel, which runs through Port Aransas.

The permit would allow a daily average flow of up to 95,600,000 gallons of brine into the channel. The proposal has stoked worries that the extra-salty water could hurt wildlife habitat in Port Aransas waters.

A desalination plant would require seawater intake also, but port officials have said they haven't determined where they would want to locate the intake. Some Port Aransans, including a citizens' group and at least a few marine scientists, have voiced concerns that the intake could vacuum up and kill, daily, hundreds of thousands of tiny young fish, shrimp and crabs that are critical to the environmental wellbeing of the area.

Council member Joan Holt, a retired marine scientist, suggested that the council vote on a resolution soon to request a contested case hearing before the TCEQ. Bujan and other council members agreed. The mayor said he expects the vote to happen during an Aug. 16 meeting.

Bujan said a contested hearing would be held before an administrative law judge, and the procedure would be much like what's involved in a civil suit.

Arguing that citizens simply don't want a desalination plant to operate in Port Aransas waters won't be enough, Bujan said.



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"The only reasons they will consider as legitimate reasons for not having it here is a scientific study showing what it will do to the environment in our area," the mayor said. "That's one of the big items, and the other is a footprint on Harbor Island, itself and how that affects traffic flow and whatever coming out of that area."

City Manager Dave Parsons said the city will be able to arm itself with scientific studies on desalination plants to bolster its case in the hearing.

Bujan said studies have shown that the intake and outfall should be three miles offshore in 100 feet of water.

A study done by a Corpus Christi consulting firm showed that the "gold standard" would mean putting the intake offshore with a "filtration gallery" under the sea bottom, allowing seawater to filter through the sand before being taken to a desalination plant, Parsons said. The idea would be to prevent sealife from being sucked away.

The consulting firm was assisted in the study by officials from the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Parsons said.

The offshore method involving the filtration gallery "is what we want to advocate for," Bujan said.

Bujan's promise to fight any desalination activity that might harm the environment was met with applause from audience members at the council meeting.

"This is some of the best news I've heard in days," citizen Cameron Pratt told the council. "I'm really happy with the aggressive stance y'all are taking, because constant vigilance is the price of freedom, and that's what we as citizens and elected officials have to have if we're going to maintain our quality of life here."

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