



## **Second desal facility eyed for Harbor Island**

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Reporter

First, a desalination plant was proposed on one part of Harbor Island.

Now, another one is being talked about for possible construction on another part of the island.

The Port of Corpus Christi has had people in Port Aransas talking for weeks about the port's plans to have a third-party build a desal plant on a piece of port property between the ferry landing and the Martin Midstream terminal.

More recently, a private company, Seven Seas Water Corporation, began talking publicly about the possibility of building a desal plant on a Harbor Island parcel west of Gulf Copper.

Whether the Seven Seas plant becomes a reality is in the hands of the City of Corpus Christi.

The City of Corpus Christi recently asked for requests of information from companies about possible ideas for alternative ways to supplement the existing water supply in the Coastal Bend.

"We are going to respond to that with a proposal for putting a desal plant on Harbor Island," said Doug Brown, CEO of Seven Seas. "We are pretty confident that we have the best alternative for supplying water, but that's up to the city (Corpus Christi) to decide."

Seven Seas, a private firm that owns about a dozen desalination facilities around the world, leased a Harbor Island site from the Ed Rachal Foundation about one year ago with plans to construct a desalination plant there, Brown said.

Prior to leasing that land, Seven Seas looked at a site in the La Quinta Channel, near Ingleside, but the firm decided it was not environmentally friendly because of the configuration of the waters in that area, he said.

Other sites also were considered before leasing the Harbor Island property.

Seven Seas operates typically by agreeing to a deal with a municipal government that is having trouble finding a source to increase the water supply. The firm covers capital, operating labor and maintenance expenses, along with supplying the water to an area through a long-term water agreement.

"There would be no capital required from the city because we would cover it," Brown said.

He also said it would be no cost to Nueces County taxpayers. Brown said it would benefit everyone in the Coastal Bend in the case of a drought.

Seven Seas plans to produce between 10 and 20 million gallons of fresh water per day based on the preliminary proposal for Harbor Island, Brown said.

"It's not a particularly large facility," he added.

Port Aransas citizens have expressed concerns about the environment, mainly on the grounds of intake flow and brine discharge from desalination.

Brown said he feels his company can make the plant environmentally friendly.

"We are highly confident we can work with local ecology to have a plan that people would look at as being safe for the local environment," he said. "At the end of the day, the amount of water that we take out of the channel is a really, really small fraction of the water that's flowing through there. ...Would discharging the brine impact the salinity of the channel? The answer is it wouldn't be measurable. It only would be measurable in the direct vicinity of the discharge."

Brown said he couldn't say exactly where brine discharge would be located because it would have to be designed first.

"The science so the brine dissipates is good," he said. "It would be state of the art."

Still, Port Aransas city officials have concerns.

"If they try to put an intake and a discharge pipe in the Corpus Christi Ship Channel, they will be met with the same action as the Port of Corpus Christi," said Port Aransas Mayor Charles Bujan. "We have exactly the same concern with this one as we had with the other one," he said.

The Port Aransas City Council recently approved to retain an Austin-based environmental law firm that likely will seek a contested hearing about the Port of Corpus Christi's plan to build a desalination plant.

Despite environmental concerns that have come up since talks about the port's plans for a desal plant emerged, Brown said he feels marine life still will thrive with Seven Seas' configuration.

"You actually find that marine life likes the brine discharge because there's a constant flow of water, and they don't care about the salinity," Brown said. "The design and development of intake systems are non-invasive to the environment. Studies have shown that properly designed intake and discharge have minimal impact on the local ecology."

He said the company would look deeply into what equipment is placed in the channel.

"We design intake so the flow of water is so slow that fish have no problems...swimming away," Brown said. "We also put screens over the pipes. We don't want fish in our pipes. That makes our job harder."

If Seven Seas is granted the deal, it likely would be a little more than two years before water is pumping out of that facility, Brown said.

Seven Seas still is in the early stages of trying to establish a plant. The firm has not yet been awarded the project from the City of Corpus Christi.

Therefore, an application for the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has not been submitted, Brown said.

"We wouldn't file until you know you have been picked for a project," he said. "We are still trying to convince the City of Corpus Christi that we have the best solution. And until we can do that, we will not file for an environmental permit."

Cosmetically, Brown said the design of the plant would not be an eyesore for Port Aransas.

“This is going to look like a warehouse,” he said. “It would look just like a building. You aren’t going to see a lot of exposed process equipment.”

The plant would be approximately two or three stories tall and 21,000 to 53,000 square feet, Brown said.

Asked if Seven Seas would meet with folks from Port Aransas at any time, he said “Our plan is to involve the appropriate people in the Coastal Bend community because we want to be good neighbors.”