



The State of New Hampshire
Department of Environmental Services



Robert R. Scott, Commissioner

March 1, 2024

The Honorable Kevin Avard
Chair, Energy and Natural Resources Committee
State House, Room 103
Concord, NH 03301

RE: Senate Bill 301, An act relative to establishing a committee to study the possibility of placing a desalination plant on the seacoast.

Dear Chair Avard and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill (SB) 301. This bill would study the possibility of constructing a new desalination water treatment plant on the seacoast including assessing the costs and benefits of such a plant for the region.

The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) would like to make you aware of ongoing initiatives that are important to consider before initiating a study proposed by SB 301.

First, in 2019, the Legislature enacted RSA 485-F:5 which established a Seacoast Commission on Long-Term Goals and Requirements for Drinking Water (commission). The commission is scheduled to complete its work through 2029. The commission has numerous ongoing initiatives for the seacoast region including completing a comprehensive study of existing and future drinking water supply and demand needs for each community in its region, assessing the costs and benefits of constructing additional emergency water supply interconnections among public water systems, and for communities that are interested, exploring opportunities for water systems to regionally share and cooperate in the management of water resources. The study is being completed by an engineering firm over the next 18 months. The results of the study could help determine if desalination is needed to address future water supply needs.

Second, the commission is aware of SB 301, and its members have agreed that it could assess and report on the merits of constructing a desalination plant in the seacoast region before it completes its work in 2029.

The potential construction of a desalination plant in the seacoast region is not a new concept and a small desalination plant has been operating since 2005 as a source of drinking water for Star Island in Rye. The Town of Seabrook completed a preliminary feasibility study for desalination in the early 2000s. NHDES reviewed the study and provided a letter outlining the regulatory requirements for construction of a drinking water desalination treatment plant for Seabrook at that time.

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Additionally, NHDES is aware that the Navy had identified the construction of a desalination treatment plant in New Hampshire as a potential water supply option to address increasing water demands associated with the expansion of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard before it decided to invest in improvements to the water system in Kittery, Maine. NHDES is aware that the Navy is interested in the ongoing seacoast water supply study referenced above and it is possible the topic of desalination could arise again in the 2030s based on forecasted demand for drinking water at the Shipyard and in Kittery, Maine relative to the current available supply.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on SB 301. Should you have questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact Brandon Kernen, Administrator of the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at Brandon.Kernen@des.nh.gov or 271-1168.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert R. Scott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert R. Scott
Commissioner

ec: Sponsors of SB 301: Senator Avard; and Representatives Hill, Rochefort and Germana