

# Water: Public vs. Polluters

*ISSUE: Will the Legislature pay more attention to industry or the public in drafting new laws to prevent water pollution?*

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The oil drilling disaster off Santa Barbara has overshadowed the other very serious pollution threats to the water resources of California.

For years inadequate laws have left the state's shoreline and harbors, rivers and lakes highly vulnerable to the discharge of wastes. Industrial, governmental and agricultural polluters, as a result, have made sewers out of once-clean waterways.

There was hope, therefore, that a special committee appointed to recommend revisions in the present anti-pollution statutes would come up with a strong series of reforms.

Unfortunately, the committee wrote a report that often is more timid than tough.

The people of California will be the losers if the Legislature does not improve upon the weaknesses in the committee's recommendations. Lawmakers, indeed, dare not ignore the public's ever-increasing concern with the quality of the environment.

This state has made extraordinary progress in providing enough water for the needs of its growing population. But as Chief Dep. Atty. Gen. Charles O'Brien told the State Water Resources Control Board last week:

"Now that we have the water for our present needs, we must insure that we can continue to drink this water, swim in it, fish in it, use it industrially, agriculturally—and recreationally."

Discharge of wastes, moreover, can be a reasonable, limited use of the state's water

resources—if such activity is carefully controlled and does not take priority over more important beneficial uses.

The Times believes there are at least four important deficiencies in the committee report that legislators should correct.

First, the report ignores the ridiculous, built-in conflict of interest on Regional Water Quality Control Boards. By law, five of the seven seats are given to spokesmen for industrial, governmental, agricultural or utility users. Only one representative of the public at large is authorized, along with a delegate from fish and game interests.

The Los Angeles regional board, for instance, has as one of its members an employe of an oil company that is considered one of the principal offenders in the pollution of the Dominguez Channel and Los Angeles Inner Harbor.

The public should be further protected by restoring to the Attorney General's office the power to initiate legal action against polluters independently of the state or regional boards.

And although the committee proposed civil penalties for pollution, the amount is far too small. The suggested penalty of \$6,000 per month, said O'Brien, "seems more like a cost of doing business than a deterrent."

Finally, the anti-pollution laws must be clarified to limit the possibility of delaying legal tactics by violators to the detriment of the public interest.

California has seen a horrible example of how its shoreline can be spoiled by pollution. We must have the strongest possible laws to protect all of our water resources.