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- **Cambrian Letters to the Editor**  
Viewpoint

# Cambria CSD's long record on water projects is not a red herring

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William Faulkner famously observed that "the past is never dead. It's not even past."

We encourage readers of The Cambrian to contemplate Faulkner's meaning, in contrast with Shirley Bianchi's apparent belief that this truism does not apply to the Cambria Community Services District ("[Red herrings about dead fish have no place in the water debate](#)," Sept. 18).

Ms. Bianchi has a number of problems with the Sierra Club's overview of the Cambria CSD's history of attempts to evade rules established to protect our coastal resources, which appeared in [our September newsletter](#), the Santa Lucian.

Our article reviewed 10 years of CSD water projects, variously characterized by frivolous lawsuits, attempted end-runs around proper procedure, the squandering of public funds, etc. We pointed out that the decision by the current CSD board to plow ahead with the financing for a permanent Advanced Water Treatment Plant prior to full environmental review, heedless of alarms sounded by state and federal resource agencies, appears to spring from that same mindset.

Ms. Bianchi claimed that "Fully more than half of the issue of the Santa Lucian dealt with problems that have occurred in the past with prior Cambria Community Services District boards." Our overview of the regulatory misadventures of the CCSD occupied about four columns of newsprint, equivalent to slightly more than one page of our 12-page publication.

We don't know what Ms. Bianchi considers the institutional history of the CCSD's attempts to get water projects permitted to be "irrelevant or simply innuendo," as she cites no examples of either. Nor does she explain why she thinks the advice given to the Cambria CSD about its water project by state coastal analysts, as reported in The Cambrian, is not "factual information."

Most of Ms. Bianchi's ire is based on a misunderstanding. She misinterpreted a caption below a photo of a dead fish among large algae blooms in San Simeon Creek (not "in a puddle of water") and claims that we stated that methyl mercury in the creek is killing fish. This is not the case, nor did we say so. The point of the caption was that significant algae blooms, which remove the oxygen from aquatic environments, suffocating fish, also provide an ideal environment (low oxygen, fermenting organic matter, warm conditions) for an increase in methyl mercury, a highly problematic substance to take into a desalination plant or concentrate in its waste flow and spray into the air — one of many reasons the CSD's water project is in need of extensive environmental review.

Other than the photo caption she misunderstood, Ms. Bianchi did not attempt to challenge or refute a single fact from the article.

In relating the CCSD's history of frequent clashes with regulators in its attempts to get permits for projects that were designed and/or sited so poorly they could not receive a permit in California's Coastal Zone, the most relevant lesson to be applied to the current situation pertains to the consistent pattern of behavior.

Ms. Bianchi seems to believe that this pattern of behavior is not the problem; rather, it is the act of pointing out this problem (which she characterizes as "negative voices" and "disruptive tactics") that is somehow responsible for the Cambria CSD's legacy of regulatory failure. This, too, can be seen as part of a historic pattern in which CSD directors and staff have encouraged the public perception that responsibility for their repeated failures belongs to everybody but themselves.

The environmental review documents produced for the CSD's latest water project have elicited responses from the California

Coastal Commission, California Department of Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Water Board and County Planning Department that are studded with such comments as “wholly insufficient...,” “not appropriate...,” “cannot ensure protection...,” “lacks evidence...,” “does not evaluate impacts...,” “we are unable to determine...,” “does not provide sufficient technical details...,” etc. That’s not good.

There’s another famous quote about those who don’t learn from the past being doomed to repeat it. Troubling signs are mounting that a repeat performance of the kind of regulatory dogfight that has characterized its previous water projects is in the offing. At this point, the community can’t afford to see the CSD prove that truism again.

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