

Senator FANNIN. I can recall when we were discussing this plant in the Middle East and we were talking about agriculture and the fact that it really would be unsound economics to try to build a plant with the information that we have today and promising something for agriculture. Is that not true?

Mr. O'MEARA. Yes, sir, agricultural water is the cheapest water on the market. Therefore, it is the most difficult for us to achieve. It is our ultimate objective and the objective to which we aim. But because of the cost of agricultural water, it is the last objective we will be able to achieve.

Senator FANNIN. Of course, when we talk about 22-cent water, we are talking about \$71.50, approximately, per acre-foot. Here we have farmers screaming when they have to pay \$8 or \$10 per acre-foot. I know in southern California, they provide water for less than \$3 per acre-foot, and still feel that this will continue. At the same time, I think we have to recognize that water coming down from north California, as I recall, would cost about \$75 per acre-foot. So it is supplemental water we are really talking about as far as agriculture is concerned; is that not true?

Mr. O'MEARA. Senator, I would like to make an observation that when the desalting program began in 1952, the cost of 1,000 gallons of desalted water was approximately equal to the cost of an acre-foot of irrigation water being delivered in the Imperial Valley. There have been some substantial changes in that situation.

The cost of desalting has been brought down now to where small plants are producing water in the range of \$200 an acre-foot. On the other hand, I have been informed by members of the Orange County Water District that they will be buying Colorado River water for about \$82 per acre-foot and that water will be 800 parts per million salinity. The California water they expect to get from the State will be in the range of \$92 per acre-foot. By the time they add their ad valorem taxes, they need to add to those figures another \$50 per acre-foot.

So right now, they are facing prices for natural fresh water in the range of \$130 to \$140 per acre-foot.

Senator FANNIN. You said the first figure was about \$325 per acre-foot was what you started with?

Mr. O'MEARA. It was higher than that, sir. It was more on the order of nearly a thousand dollars.

Senator FANNIN. I know, but I meant when you started talking about bringing down southern California water, it was about \$325 at that time?

Mr. O'MEARA. Yes, sir.

Senator FANNIN. Now they have cut that more than in half.

But what chances do we have? What is your estimate of what it would cost for water if we built the large plant that you talk about? I realize that these are estimates; and understand, I am wholeheartedly with you. I feel that we should concentrate on this to a much greater extent than we have in the past. We should appropriate a large sum of money, whatever is proven to be feasible and practical. But what is your estimate as to what you could do now with the present information that you have available?