

EDITORIALS

Helpful spotlight on our water

The push to address water quality on Long Island has received a major boost from Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo. He is forming a task force to come up with recommendations to protect our groundwater, improve wastewater treatment and bolster storm resiliency. The initiative has the potential to be a game-changer.

Up to now, the battle to reduce nitrogen pollution, the prime culprit in the fouling of our waters, has been a war between fiefdoms with varying agendas — environmentalists, farmers, scientists, builders, local governments, civic groups and others. So the importance of the state's involvement to shepherd the issue cannot be overstated. In three meetings next month, the task force will hear well-known, data-driven arguments about why action is urgently needed. It also will hear from those looking to protect their own interests who don't see the need for urgency and disagree on who is responsible for water pollution.

This task force should synthesize all that and advance a set of concrete solutions — including some kind of limits on the discharge of nitrogen, and steps to achieve and enforce them. And, of course, the funding to make it possible.

The governor's move might be politically motivated — it is an election year, he wants to win big in Nassau and Suffolk counties, and he knows water is a huge and bipartisan issue here. But so what. His motivation matters less than the fact he is addressing an issue vitally important to Long Island.

The task force is a promising start. But it's only a start. It must produce a substantive blueprint for change and there must be swift and certain follow-up. Our water problems were years in the making. Only concerted effort will turn the tide. Cuomo's initiative could lay the groundwork for doing that. And then the cleaning of our waters finally will begin. **N**