

**A PILOT-SCALE FERTILISER
DRAWN FORWARD OSMOSIS AND
NANOFILTRATION HYBRID
SYSTEM FOR DESALINATION**

by

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A Thesis submitted in fulfilment for the degree of

MASTER of ENGINEERING



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July 2013

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledge within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to everyone for their hard work. I owe my supervisor Dr. Ho kyong Shon and Sherub Phuntsho who have supported and helped me an immeasurable debt of gratitude. And I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my research colleagues, Tahir Majeed, Soleyman Mamisaheby, Laura Chekli and Fezeh Lotfi.

I would like to extend my appreciation to all my family members and friends, especially my parents; they always believe and support me. And my younger sister, Amy, when she stayed with me in Australia, she always encourages me and cheers me up. I also would never imagine my life in UTS without my friends; Olivia, Irene, and Heather.

Writing this master thesis and organizing the data from all the experiments were a big challenge to me. However, my supervisor Dr. Ho Kyong Shon and Sherub Phunsto gave me the constant guidance and encouragement throughout the entire course of the Mater degree; as a result, I completed my master thesis very successfully.

Journal articles

1. Sherub Phuntsho, Soleyman Mamisahebi, Tahir Majeed, Fezeh Lotfi, **Jung Eun Kim**, Ho Kyong Shon. 'Assessing the major factors affecting the performances of forward osmosis and its implications on the desalination process' *Chemical Engineering Journal*, 2013 Accepted.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1385894713009650>
2. **Jung Eun Kim**, Sherub Phuntsho, Fezeh Lotfi, Ho Kyong Shon. 'Investigation of pilot-scale 8040 FO membrane module at different operating conditions for brackish water desalination in a real field' *Desalination and Water Treatment*, 2013, Submitted.
3. Sherub Phuntsho, **Jung Eun Kim**, Fezeh Lotfi, and Ho Kyong Shon. 'Mono/di-ammonium phosphate fertilisers as draw solutions for forward osmosis desalination' *International Desalination Association on Desalination & Water Reuse*, 2013, Accepted.
4. **Jung Eun Kim**, Sherub Phuntsho, Ho Kyong Shon. 'Pilot-scale nanofiltration system as post-treatment for fertiliser-drawn forward osmosis desalination for direct fertigation' *Desalination and Water Treatment ahead-of-print* (2013), 1-9.
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19443994.2013.780804>
5. Tahir Majeed, Fezeh Lotfi, Soleyman Sahebi, Sherub Phuntsho, **Jung Eun Kim**, and Ho Kyong Shon. 'Fertilizer Drawn Forward Osmosis (FDFO) Desalination for Fertigation: Application to Tomato' *Desalination and Water Treatment*, 2013 Submitted.

Conference papers

1. Soleyman Mamisahebi, Ho Kyong Shon, Sherub Phuntsho, Fezeh Lotfi, **Jung Eun Kim**. Factors affecting performances of forward osmosis desalination process. *Procedia Engineering*, Volume 44, 2012, Pages 1449-1451

Book chapters

1. Sherub Phuntsho, **Jung Eun Kim**, Ho Kyong Shon. Fertiliser drawn forward osmosis desalination for direct fertigation. Chapter 18, 455-510. In “Forward Osmosis: Fundamentals and Applications” edited by Ho Kyong Shon, Sherub Phuntsho, T.C. Zhang, R.Y. Surampalli. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE).
2. Laura Chekli, Sherub Phuntsho, **Jung Eun Kim**, Ho Kyong Shon. Draw solutions for forward osmosis. Chapter 6, 322-383. In “Forward Osmosis: Fundamentals and Applications” edited by Ho Kyong Shon, Sherub Phuntsho, T.C. Zhang, R.Y. Surampalli. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE).

Awards

1. **Jung Eun Kim**, Sherub Phuntsho, Ho Kyong Shon. Pilot-scale nanofiltration system as post-treatment for fertiliser-drawn forward osmosis desalination for direct fertigation. Presentation at International Desalination and workshop (IDW), Jeju, Korea, 28-31 October 2012. Awarded best oral presentation award.
2. **Jung Eun Kim**. Pilot-scale low-energy forward osmosis process for brackish water desalination. Presentation at Faculty of Engineering & IT Showcase, 2013. Awarded best oral presentation award (The best innovation prize).
3. **Jung Eun Kim**. Pilot-scale low-energy forward osmosis process for brackish water desalination. Presentation at Faculty of Engineering & IT Showcase, 2013. Awarded best poster presentation award.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FO	Forward osmosis
FDFO	Fertiliser drawn forward osmosis
DS	Draw solution
FS	Feed solution
BGW	Brackish groundwater
MDB	Murray-Darling Basin
RSF	Reverse salt flux
RO	Reverse osmosis
SWRO	Seawater reverse osmosis
SWFO	Spiral wound forward osmosis
CP	Concentration polarisation
ICP	Internal concentration polarisation
ECP	External concentration polarisation
CTA	Cellulose triacetate
TFC	Thin film composite
PWP	Pure water permeability
DI	Deionized water
MW	Molecular weight
HTI	Hydration Technology Innovations
MF	Microfiltration
NF	Nanofiltration
UF	Ultrafiltration
TDS	Total dissolved solids
SOA	Ammonium sulphate or $(\text{NH}_4)_2 \text{SO}_4$

LIST OF SYMBOLS

A	Pure water permeability coefficient	$\text{Lm}^{-2}\text{h}^{-1}\text{bar}^{-1}$
B	Salt permeability coefficient	ms^{-1}
C	Solute molar concentration	Mg/L or M
D	Diffusion coefficient of solute	m^2s^{-1}
D_h	Hydraulic diameter	m
J_w	Water flux	$\text{Lm}^{-2}\text{h}^{-1}$ or LMH
J_s	Solute flux	$\text{moles m}^{-2}\text{h}^{-1}$
K	Solute resistivity	s/m
k	Mass transfer coefficient	m/s
M_w	Molecular weight	mol/g
Re	Reynolds number	
R	Salt rejection	%
S_c	Schmidt number	
Sh	Sherwood number	
π	Osmotic pressure	
σ	Reflection coefficient	
t	Thickness of membrane	m
τ	Tortuosity of membrane	
ε	Porosity of membrane	
$P_{i,pump}$	Pump input power	kWh
E_s	Specific energy consumption	kWh/m^3
<i>Subscript</i>		
b	Bulk	
d	Draw solution	
f	Feed solution	
i	Cation/Anion	
m	Membrane wall	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1.	Introduction	1
1.2.	Requirement of a novel desalination technology to solve water scarcity and potential for forward osmosis (FO) process	3
1.3.	Application of FO process for agricultural purposes: Integrated fertiliser driven FO (FDFO) desalination process with nanofiltration (NF)	6
1.4.	Objectives and the research scope	9

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.	Introduction	12
	2.2.1.Osmotic processes	12
	2.2.2.Development of draw solutions for FO process	13
	2.2.3.Concentration polarisation (CP) in FO process	16
	2.2.3.1.External concentration polarisation (ECP)	17
	2.2.3.2.Internal concentration polarisation (ICP)	20
2.3.	Performance of the integrated FO process with other conventional technologies	22
2.4.	Demonstration of pilot-scale FO process	26
2.5.	Full-scale RO and FO desalination plants: Case study	29
	2.5.1.(Case 1) Seawater reverse osmosis (SWRO) desalination plant in Fujairah, United Arab Emirates	30
	2.5.2.(Case 2) Forward osmosis (FO) desalination plant in the Al Wusta region of the Sultanate of Oman	32
2.6.	A novel concept of hybrid FDFO-NF desalination process for direct fertigation	35
	2.6.1.Single and blended fertilisers as DS for FDFO desalination process	37

2.6.1.1.	Performance of single fertilisers as DS	37
2.6.1.2.	Performance of blended fertilisers as DS	38
2.7.	Evaluation of lab-scale of the integration of fertiliser driven FO process with NF	40
2.8.	Energy consumption of FO process and other current desalination processes	45

CHAPTER 3

EXPERIMENTAL METHODS AND MATERIALS

3.1.	Introduction	49
3.2.	Experimental materials	49
3.2.1.	Feed and draw solutions	49
3.2.1.1.	Feed solution (FS) for forward osmosis (FO) process	49
3.2.1.2.	Feed solution (FS) for nanofiltration (NF) process as post-treatment	51
3.2.1.3.	Draw solution (DS) for forward osmosis (FO) process	51
3.3.	Membranes	52
3.3.1.	Forward osmosis (FO) membrane	52
3.3.2.	Nanofiltration (NF) membrane	53
3.4.	Pilot-scale experimental set-up	55
3.4.1.	Pilot-scale fertiliser driven FO process experimental set-up	55
3.4.2.	Pilot-scale NF process experimental set-up	57

CHAPTER 4

INVESTIGATION OF PILOT-SCALE 8040 FO MEMBRANE MODULE UNDER DIFFERENT OPERATING CONDITIONS FOR BRACKISH WATER DESALINATION

4.1.	Introduction	60
4.2.	Experimental	61
4.2.1.	Two FO membrane modules experimental set-up	62

4.2.2.	Measurement of water flux	63
4.3.	Results and discussion	64
4.3.1.	Baseline of 8040 spiral wound FO membrane modules	64
4.3.2.	Flux behaviour under different feed flow rates	65
4.3.3.	Effect of SOA DS concentration on the permeate flux	69
4.3.4.	Effect of the feed TDS concentration on the permeate flux	70
4.4.	Concluding remarks	72

CHAPTER 5

NANOFILTRATION SYSTEM AS POST-TREATMENT FOR FERTILISER DRAWN FORWARD OSMOSIS DESALINATION FOR DIRECT FERTIGATION

5.1.	Introduction	75
5.2.	Experimental	76
5.2.1.	Feed solution for NF process and NF membrane	77
5.2.2.	Pilot-scale of NF process experimental set-up and operation	78
5.3.	Results and discussion	79
5.3.1.	Initial performance of NF process using DI water and NaCl as FS	79
5.3.2.	Performance of pilot-scale NF process under different operating conditions	81
5.3.3.	Nutrient (N) concentration in the final product water after NF process	84
5.3.3.1.	Final nutrient concentration in lab-scale system with NF process as post-treatment	84
5.3.3.2.	Final nutrient concentration in pilot-scale of NF process as-post treatment	85
5.3.4.	Final nutrient concentration (N) under different operating conditions	86
5.4.	Concluding remarks	88

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION OF ENERGY CONSUMPTION OF FDFO-NF DESALINATION PROCESS

6.1.	Introduction	91
6.2.	Electrical power consumption for pumps	92
6.3.	Specific energy requirements of FDFO-NF desalination system compared to other desalination processes	93
6.4.	Economic analysis of FDFO-NF desalination process using the representative operating values	96
6.5.	Concluding remarks	97

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1.	Conclusions	99
7.2.	Recommendations and future works	102

REFERENCES	104
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1. The total water use for Australia by 2050, 40,000 gigalitres per year (Foran and Poldy, 2002).....	2
Figure 1-2. The movement of solvent in forward osmosis (FO), pressure retarded osmosis (PRO), and reverse osmosis (RO).....	4
Figure 1-3. Advantages of forward osmosis (FO) process (Zhao et al., 2012).....	4
Figure 1-4. The basic concept of fertiliser driven forward osmosis (FDFO) desalination process.	6
Figure 1-5. Structure of the research.....	10
Figure 2-1. Flow chart of selecting DS criteria (Chekli et al., 2012).....	16
Figure 2-2. Both internal concentration polarisation (ICP) and external concentration polarisation (ECP) through an asymmetric FO membrane. (a) PRO mode: the dense active layer faces the draw solution, concentrative ICP and dilutive ECP are illustrated. (b) FO mode: the porous support layer faces the draw solution, dilutive ICP and concentrative ECP are illustrated. ($\pi_{D,b}$, $\pi_{D,m}$ are the bulk draw osmotic pressure and the membrane surface osmotic pressure on the permeate side, $\pi_{F,b}$, $\pi_{F,m}$ are the bulk feed osmotic pressure and the membrane surface osmotic pressure on the feed side, $\pi_{F,i}$, $\pi_{D,i}$ are the effective osmotic pressure of the feed in PRO mode and that of the draw in FO mode, and $\Delta\pi$ is the effective osmotic driving force) (McCutcheon and Elimelech, 2006).....	19
Figure 2-3. Schematic diagram of lab-scale osmotic membrane bioreactor (OsMBR) system (Achilli et al., 2009).....	23
Figure 2-4. Proposed configuration of hybrid FO-NF system for seawater desalination (Tan and Ng, 2010).	24
Figure 2-5. Schematic diagram of the lab-scale FO-MD hybrid system adapted from (Wang et al., 2011).	25

Figure 2-6. 4040 spiral wound FO module (HTI) in a fabricated pilot-scale FO system (Kim and Park, 2011).....	27
Figure 2-7. Schematic diagram of the FO MBC pilot process (McGinnis et al., 2012).	29
Figure 2-8. Fujairah SWRO desalination plant - Reverse osmosis building view and location (Sanza et al., 2007).....	31
Figure 2-9. Forward osmosis (FO) desalination process diagram (Thompson and Nicoll, 2011).	33
Figure 2-10. (a) Laboratory test system at Surrey University, UK. (b) Gibraltar trial facility (Thompson and Nicoll, 2011).	33
Figure 2-11. The Public Authority for Electricity and Water (PAEW) water site at Al Khaluf (Thompson and Nicoll, 2011).	34
Figure 2-12. Modified concept of FDFO desalination process diagram for direct fertigation (Phuntsho et al., 2011).	36
Figure 2-13. (a) The diagram of integrated FDFO desalination process with NF process as pre-treatment and (b) NF process as post-treatment (Phuntsho et al., 2012a, Phuntsho et al., 2013).	42
Figure 3-1. Salt scheme interception in the Murray Darling Basin (MDB).....	50
Figure 3-2. Schematic diagram of a spiral wound forward osmosis (FO) module showing the direction of water in the module.	53
Figure 3-3. Schematic diagram of a 4040 spiral wound nanofiltration (NF) module showing the direction of water in the module.	54
Figure 3-4. (a) 2,000 mg/L NaCl water flux and (b) NaCl rejection in the pilot-scale NE 90 membrane.....	55
Figure 3-5. Schematic diagram (a) and photo (b) of pilot-scale FDFO-NF hybrid desalination system.	57

Figure 4-1. A schematic diagram of the pilot-scale FDFO-NF hybrid desalination system. The NF process operation was conducted independently by gathering the diluted DS during the FO process run.	64
Figure 4-2. Water flux using pre-treated tap water and 5% NaCl as FS and DS, respectively. The expected water flux was 8 ± 2 LMH, as recommended by the membrane manufacturer. Feed and draw flow rates were maintained at 50 L/min and 0.5 L/min respectively during each module operation.	65
Figure 4-3. Effect of feed flow rate on water flux in both FO membrane modules. Experimental conditions: 0.6 M SOA DS and BGW5 FS, feed flow rates of 50, 70, and 100 L/min.	68
Figure 4-4. Performance of two FO modules using different concentrations of SOA fertiliser DS. Experimental conditions: 0.6, 0.8, and 1.0 M SOA DS and BGW5 FS, feed flow rate of 50 L/min.	70
Figure 4-5. Effect of feed TDS concentrations on the water flux in both SW FO membrane modules. Experimental conditions: 1.0 M SOA DS and FS of BGW5, 10, and 35, feed flow rate of 50 L/min.	72
Figure 5-1. Pressure vessel with NF membrane module.	78
Figure 5-2. Schematic diagram of experimental pilot-scale of both FDFO system and NF process.	79
Figure 5-3. (a) Water flux permeability at different applied pressures for both DI and 2,000 mg/L NaCl as FS. (b) Rejection of 2,000 mg/L NaCl at different applied pressures.	81
Figure 5-4. Specific water flux (a) and rejection (b) with applied pressure for the diluted fertiliser (SOA) as FS for NF process at different flow rates and concentrations.	83
Figure 5-5. Conductivity of the final product water in NF process under different operating conditions with different feed pressures.	88
Figure 5-6. Expected N concentration in the final product water under different operating conditions with different feed pressures.	88

Figure 6-1. FDFO-NF desalination process in simplified form. FP, Feed pump; HP, High pressure pump. 93

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1. The largest SWRO desalination plants (Kim et al., 2009).....	30
Table 2-2. Operational results of SWRO plant; data adapted from (Sanza et al., 2007).	31
Table 2-3. List of fertilisers selected in previous study with their basic properties (Phuntsho et al., 2011, Phuntsho et al., 2012).....	39
Table 2-4. Performance of FDFO desalination process using the blended fertilisers as DS with DI water and BGW as FS (Phuntsho et al., 2012).	40
Table 2-5. Comparison of the total water volume from the FDFO desalination process using NF process as pre-treatment and post-treatment, and the total capacity of water extracted per kg of fertilizers (Phuntsho et al., 2013).....	43
Table 2-6. Comparison of final nutrient concentrations (N/P/K) from the FDFO desalination process using NF process as options the option to reduce final nutrient concentrations (Phuntsho et al., 2013).	43
Table 2-7. Comparison of energy requirements of current seawater desalination technologies to the FO process.....	47
Table 3-1. Composition of brackish ground salt from the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB).....	50
Table 3-2. FS and DS used for all pilot-scale FDFO-NF process studies. Osmotic pressures of both solutions were determined by OLI Stream Analyser 3.2 (OLI Systems Inc., Morris Plains, NJ, US).....	51
Table 3-3. Specifications of 8040 FO CS and 8040 FO MS elements.....	53
Table 5-1. Summary of membrane characteristics (NE4040-90).	76
Table 5-2. Evaluation of final nutrient concentration in lab-scale system using NF as post-treatment.	85

Table 5-3. The conductivity change of SOA as DS in pilot-scale FDFO desalination process and the predicted permeate flux conductivity using the diluted SOA as FS in NF process.	86
Table 6-1. Comparison of energy requirements of current seawater desalination technologies.....	94
Table 6-2. Assumed power consumption of SWRO and FDFO processes assuming that the capacity of all processes is adapted to the capacity of the full-scale SWRO and FO plants, respectively.	95

SUMMARY

The usage of fresh water for both non-potable and potable purposes will increase with the surging growth in water demand. Rapid increases in population contribute to the significant consumption of fresh water resources and massive increase in food demand. Water consumption in the agricultural sector is more than 70% of the total water usage worldwide. Water scarcity is one of the greatest issues confronting people everywhere and almost one-fifth of the world's population lives in areas of physical water scarcity. Sustainable fresh water resources have to be created and developed to solve this water problem; however, 97.5% of the earth's water is seawater. Nevertheless, it is an abundant and unlimited source of saline water, and the desalination of seawater or brackish groundwater for both non-potable and potable water supply is therefore increasingly being considered as one of the solutions to water scarcity. A drawback is that the significant energy consumption of current desalination technologies mostly contributes to the cost of desalination. Cost-effective desalination technology for non-potable water, particularly for irrigation use, would contribute to a significant reduction in freshwater consumption and would make more freshwater available for other potable uses.

One of the most promising technologies is the forward osmosis (FO) process in which the driving force is generated by the concentration gradient, unlike the reverse osmosis (RO) process where the driving force is hydraulic pressure, which leads to significant energy consumption. In the FO process, freshwater is extracted from saline water and flows to a concentrated draw solution (DS) using a special FO membrane. However, the FO process still has issues such as the lack of a suitable DS and FO membrane, resulting in it having limited application for drinking water supply purposes. In addition, an additional process to separate DS solutes and pure water is required which could lead to increased energy consumption.

Considering the challenges of the FO process for potable water, a novel concept of fertiliser drawn forward osmosis (FDFO) has recently been introduced. In this process, a highly concentrated fertiliser solution is used as the DS to extract water from saline water sources

using a semi-permeable membrane by natural osmosis. The main concept and advantages of the FDFO desalination process is that the final product water, the diluted fertiliser DS, can be used for direct fertigation and thus the separation of draw solutes is not necessary. The FDFO process requires significantly less energy because there is almost zero hydraulic pressure. However, because of a number of intrinsic process limitations with FO, the diluted fertiliser DS does not usually meet the water quality standards for direct fertigation especially when a high salt concentration of feed water is used. The final diluted DS may require dilution to several orders of magnitude before it is suitable for direct application. To reduce the concentration of the diluted DS, the nanofiltration (NF) process has been suggested as a post-treatment process to reduce fertiliser nutrient concentrations in the diluted fertiliser DS. The concept of the integrated FDFO desalination process with NF membrane has been suggested and evaluated in bench-scale experiments in earlier studies; consequently, a large-scale FDFO-NF desalination process has been fabricated and tested in this study on a pilot-scale level.

The pilot-scale unit consists of three main components: microfiltration (MF) pre-treatment for FDFO desalination and NF for post reduction of nutrient concentrations. The main objective of this study is the process optimisation of the FDFO-NF unit. Specific objectives include investigating the influence of operating conditions such as cross flow rates, DS concentration, feed salinity and type of spacer on the performance of the pilot-scale unit.

Two types of 8040 FO membrane modules (the corrugated spacer (CS) module and the medium spacer (MS) module) were used for the FDFO process. Ammonium sulphate (SOA) was used as the fertiliser DS, while the feed water was prepared using salts obtained from brackish groundwater in the Murray-Darling Basin. The water flux increased at higher feed flow rates caused by the increase in mass transfer coefficient across the membrane surface. In addition, the effect of feed total dissolved solids (TDS) played an important role in the flux performance in both FO modules. Furthermore, it was observed that the 8040 FO CS module (corrugated spacer) performed better than the 8040 FO MS (medium spacer) in all experiments. It is likely that this is because the corrugated spacer provides better hydrodynamic conditions

within the channel for feed thereby reducing the dilutive and concentrative external concentration polarisation and ultimately enhancing the water flux. The other possibility is that the larger DS volume within the spacer, which can maintain a higher level of DS concentration, leading to a higher average water flux of modules but a lower dilution effect, was observed in the CS module. In this study, it has been indicated that the role of the spacer's design and thickness on the spiral wound module performance is important. Fertiliser nutrient concentrations from the NF process in the final product can be significantly influenced by both the concentration and the components of the diluted DS produced by both FO modules. Investigation of FO module performance shows the significance of the optimisation of various operating parameters and the modular design of the membrane in the overall performance of the FO process.

The performance of the pilot-scale NF (4040 module) process has been assessed in terms of water flux and salt rejection. A pilot-scale NF process was applied as a post-treatment for the diluted fertiliser DS produced by the FDFO desalination to reduce the concentration of fertiliser nutrient. The NF process was conducted under different operating parameters; feed flow rate and concentration and applied pressures. Nanofiltration was effective in reducing nitrogen (N) concentration in the diluted draw solution. Although other factors such as the applied pressure and cross flow rate played a role in the performance of the pilot-scale NF process, the influence of the feed concentration was more significant on the specific water flux and the nutrient rejection.

The energy requirements of the FDFO-NF desalination process were initially investigated using the operating values. In this study, the total energy consumption of the process refers to the electrical energy usage of the pumps thus the pump power efficiency has been converted to the specific energy consumption (SEC). The SEC of the pilot-scale system was dependent on the operation of the FDFO desalination process because the lower diluted fertiliser refers to lower energy consumption in the NF process. The most attractive advantage of the FO process is that it leads to lower energy consumption than current desalination

processes due to the natural osmosis in the FO process. Therefore, in this study, it was proved that the specific energy consumption of our FDFO-NF hybrid system for brackish water desalination was around 47% less than the NF-SWRO hybrid system for desalination.