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The Southern California Coastal Water Research Project -- 30 years of environmental research in the Southern California Bight

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PREFACE

“An hypothesis is always more believable than the truth, for it has been tailored to resemble our ideas of truth whereas the truth is just its own clumsy self. Ergo, never discover the truth when an hypothesis will do.”

Nicoli Machiavelli as quoted by Professor John D. Isaacs, Chair, SCCWRP Scientific Consulting Board, 1969-1980, in testimony before the U.S. Congress, 1978 (Isaacs 1978).

This tongue-in-cheek usage of a Renaissance quote, scrawled across the blackboard of a smoke-filled conference room, challenged the young staff of the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) as they nervously assembled for yet another wrenching review of their work by SCCWRP's first Scientific Consulting Board. Every four or five months during the early 1970s, Directors George Hlavka, and then Willard Bascom, called together five internationally recognized senior scientists. They would spend the long weekend drilling, chiding, challenging, and, eventually, commending the SCCWRP staff of young oceanographers, biologists, geochemists, and bright administrative and support personnel. Often present were staff from the sponsoring agencies as well as scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) New York Bight and Puget Sound Marine EcoSystem Analysis Programs (MESA); representatives of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Regional Office Director (San Francisco); and staff of the EPA's Research and Development Program in Corvallis, Oregon. In those days, stealing good ideas was a form of flattery.

This setting is an early part of the consciousness of a unique organization that as yet has no parallel in the United States or abroad — the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project. Since its inception in 1969, approximately 200 scientists, technicians, and administrative personnel have passed through the portals of SCCWRP (see below); most have moved on to other agencies and locations in California and the U.S., taking with them, and continuing, the excitement, challenges, team-manship, myth-breaking philosophy, and camaraderie that began so many years ago in a place that continues to this day to strive for superiority as a major marine environmental research and assessment center. Fortunately, a few original staff remain onscene, or nearby, providing valuable experience and sharing in new discoveries.

To mark a major milestone in the publication of the SCCWRP 2000 Annual Report, this article is a joint effort by former and current SCCWRP scientists to create a sense of history and describe the accomplishments made by past and current scientists, administrators, and directors employed by SCCWRP over the past 30 years. The goal of this article is to provide historical facts presented in the context of past and continuing missions of SCCWRP, and to emphasize the vitally important role of a long-term, coordinated scientific role and perspective in environmental management. Above all, SCCWRP has always been defined by, and will continue to be defined by, controversy, challenge, and

vision. It is after all controversy and challenge that sharpens our vision and continues to improve the world around us.

Our attempt is necessarily limited by the constraints imposed by the passing of time. Fortunately, much of the history of SCCWRP is recorded in various pages of 19 Annual and Biennial Reports and several dozen newsletters. We collected and reviewed, to the extent possible, relevant information about the governing bodies, funding sources, directors, staff, locations, and scientific activities that make up the parts of the whole that SCCWRP is today. However, some relevant information - most notably data on some revenues and their sources and the tenures of some commissioners and staff - could not be located despite extensive fact finding efforts. We reserve those missing pieces for some future effort.

To put the facts and figures that were available in a larger context, the authors discussed and reflected upon SCCWRP's accomplishments over the years and also attempted to look at the history of SCCWRP from the perspective of changing local and national settings - environmental, policy, public opinion, and science. Challenging dogma, practicing forward-thinking science in the face of criticism, and working in cooperative associations with regional stakeholders have been key elements of SCCWRP's history, unique character, and longevity. This review addresses these points and cites national documents and papers that are not part of the SCCWRP literature *per se* but which reflect directly on SCCWRP's research and motivations. The serious student of SCCWRP and the SCCWRP sponsor will want to use these documents as starting points for additional research. It is this context that puts the facts and figures into a unique yet dynamic perspective.

Full Text

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