

AGENDA ITEM #1

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COASTAL WATER RESEARCH PROJECT AUTHORITY

Held at the
Irvine Hyatt Regency

Thursday, September 6, 2001
9:00 a.m.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Stan Martinson - *State Water Resources Control Board*
Dennis Dickerson - *Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region*
Gerard Thibeault - *Regional Water Quality Control Board, Santa Ana Region*
Arthur Coe - *Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Diego Region*
Ing-Yih Cheng - *City of Los Angeles*
Bob Horvath - *County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County*
Robert Ghirelli - *Orange County Sanitation District*
Jim Stahl - *County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County*
Janet Hashimoto - *US Environmental Protection Agency, Region IX*
Alan Langworthy - *City of San Diego*

STAFF PRESENT

Stephen Weisberg - *Executive Director*
Bryan Nece - *Administrative Officer*
M. James Allen - *Principal Scientist*
Steven Bay - *Principal Scientist*
Kenneth Schiff - *Principal Scientist*
Larry Cooper - *Information Systems Manager*
Debbie Elmore - *Administrative Analyst*

OTHERS PRESENT

Bruce Posthumus - *Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Diego Region*
Dave Montagne - *County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County*
George Robertson - *Orange County Sanitation District*
Chris Beegan - *State Water Resources Control Board*
Brian Sasaki - *Los Angeles County Dept. of Public Works*
Lucy Jao - *City of Los Angeles*
Michael Lyons - *Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region*
Chris Campell - *Southern California Coalition for Pollution Prevention*
Lori Vereker - *City of San Diego*
Walter Konopka - *City of San Diego*

Commissioner Stahl called the meeting to order at 9:10 am. All individuals in the room were asked to introduce themselves. Commissioner Stahl explained that the purpose of this special meeting was to discuss long-term planning issues. The discussion of each agenda item would start with the Executive Director providing background information along with his recommendation. The Commission would then discuss the issue and provide guidance to the

Executive Director. He indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to generate discussion about future directions, rather than to make decisions or take votes on specific issues.

1. AREAS OF RESEARCH FOCUS

Dr. Weisberg started his presentation by explaining that there are two activities that set the direction of SCCWRP's technical activities. First, the senior staff meet annually to define a series of high-priority, multi-year target products that they believe will be of value to the member organizations. Second, the Executive Director conducts strategic hires in technical areas that he would like to see the organization expand. These new hires are not given specific products to produce, but are given the freedom to develop the area in a manner that best matches their skills and the opportunities that develop.

Dr. Weisberg next described the areas in which he anticipates targeting SCCWRP's focal products over the next five years:

1) Watershed/water quality models: Dr. Weisberg indicated that runoff is now the biggest source of contaminants to the ocean and coastal water quality management increasingly depends on effective land use management. Watershed models are necessary to assess which land use types and what types of storms contribute most to runoff and to assess the likely effectiveness of alternative control strategies such as stormwater retention sizing criteria. The agency's goal is to develop watershed models that are used as effective decision-making tools throughout southern California.

2) Information Management: Very little monitoring data in southern California is available electronically and much of the historic data is already lost. These shortcomings limit scientific assessments. SCCWRP is in a unique position to address these concerns, given that its member organizations are the largest generators of data and that SCCWRP organizes regional monitoring surveys that include the majority of the other monitoring entities. The goal is to develop data systems that foster data exchange among scientists as well as enhance data sharing with the public.

3) Source Identification Tools: Most of the monitoring conducted in southern California is focused on characterizing the magnitude or spatial extent of problems. Effective management also requires knowing the source of the problem. The interaction of wastewater and runoff plumes, which are further complicated by contributions from diffuse sources such as atmospheric deposition, can make source identification difficult. Source identification development efforts will focus on four areas: 1) Chemical markers of source type, 2) Microbiological markers, 3) Rapid microbiological measurement techniques that allow a source to be followed upstream, and 4) Sediment toxicity identification evaluation techniques that discriminate the specific chemical group leading to sediment toxicity.

Dr. Weisberg next described the technical areas in which he would like to conduct key hires over the next five years.

1) Wetlands: Engineered wetlands are increasingly being proposed as water quality technology to filter nutrients and bacteria. The scientific basis for using wetlands in this regard is limited and is mostly derived from research in temperate systems that differ substantially from those in southern California. SCCWRP has recently hired an expert in biogeochemistry of wetlands to study natural water quality cycling in southern California marshes and determine the circumstances under which created marshes can be effective filters.

2) Physical Oceanography: Knowledge of plume location and factors that affect it are central to evaluation of any ocean discharge. Several federal agencies, using new technologies are developing a coastal component of the Global Ocean Observing System that will have its roots in coastal physical oceanography. The goal of this hire would be to place SCCWRP in a leadership role in bringing this technology to southern California.

3) Remote Sensing: Satellites and aerial photography provide numerous opportunities to measure select coastal processes cheaper and with more spatial perspective than on-the-ground measurements. New satellites with advanced sensors and enhanced spatial resolution have been, or are about to be, launched. The goal of this hire would be to ensure that these new capabilities are being exploited in southern California's coastal zone.

DISCUSSION:

Several Commissioners asked for clarification about the topics that were presented, but generally expressed agreement with the future research directions that were outlined. Commissioner Horvath asked whether SCCWRP could accomplish all of the items that were outlined within existing budgets. Dr. Weisberg indicated that base contributions from member organizations were insufficient to accomplish all of these activities, but that the agency's approach has been to use its base resources as seed money to initiate work in these areas and also use the internal resources as match to attract outside funds. This strategy guarantees that we will investigate possibilities in each of these areas, but our ability to achieve full success depends on the level of outside interest. Dr. Weisberg indicated that this strategy has been successful to date and he anticipates outside interest in each of the areas he outlined.

Commissioners Langworthy and Stahl asked why stormwater studies were not included in the presentation and how much effort Dr. Weisberg envisioned the agency expending on stormwater issues. Dr. Weisberg responded that many of the projects, while not specific to stormwater, were relevant to stormwater agencies. He gave as examples the watershed modeling and source identification areas, both of which have to do with understanding the relative contributions of stormwater and sewage related sources. He indicated that there were several areas specific to stormwater agencies, such as regional stream studies and development of stream biocriteria, that were discussed among staff and deliberately omitted from the five year vision. Dr. Weisberg stated that these were worthwhile topics, but he saw the five year vision as defining areas that we would proactively invest current members' core funding. Unless stormwater agencies join SCCWRP and contribute funding, it would not be prudent to focus internal funding toward activities specific to those agencies. He did allow for the possibility of working on such projects with external funding and indicated that more than \$0.5M of our present external funding was from stormwater agencies to work on projects of specific interest to them.

Commissioner Langworthy asked whether CTAG had discussed the five-year research vision. Bruce Posthumus, Chairman of CTAG, stated that Dr. Weisberg had presented his research plan at the last CTAG meeting. He informed the Commission that CTAG had reached a consensus concurring with the plan. Commissioner Stahl concluded this agenda item by complementing Dr. Weisberg on his presentation and indicating that he should proceed in the directions outlined.

2. BROADENING PARTICIPATION IN SCCWRP

Dr. Weisberg stated that the SCCWRP Commission has repeatedly expressed interest in the question of expanding its membership to include other organizations, particularly stormwater permittees. Dr. Weisberg indicated that he shared the Commission's interest because SCCWRP research has increasingly focused on land-based influences on the ocean, including technical support for TMDL development, and our study results increasingly affect or require action by other organizations that are not present during Commission or CTAG discussion of our projects. He felt that one of the strengths of SCCWRP was its facilitation of discussion among interested parties about the scientific foundation for decision-making and that was inhibited by the absence of key parties associated with select projects.

Dr. Weisberg outlined three options for broadening participation. The first was to continue interacting with other organizations on a project-specific basis. He indicated that SCCWRP has averaged more than 250K in funding from stormwater agencies on a project-specific basis over the last several years and that he expected that would continue into the future. Moreover, all of the lead stormwater permittees have signed a memorandum of agreement (with SCCWRP as one of the signatories) to fund development of a regional stormwater research agenda, with the presumption that they would later fund implementation of that agenda. SCCWRP is a likely recipient of many of those project-specific research funds.

The second option was to add new members to the SCCWRP Commission. Dr. Weisberg reminded the Commission that the Joint Powers Agreement that went into effect on July 1 allows for new members to be added to the Commission through a 2/3 majority vote of existing Commission members. Dr. Weisberg then raised four issues that he wanted the Commission to address if they selected this option: 1) Who should be invited to join? He gave the Commission a list of almost 30 candidate organizations that had been developed jointly with CTAG; 2) What was the desired size of the Commission to ensure active participation? 3) What level of financial contribution, if any, should new members be asked to provide? and 4) What was the recruitment process that would be used to attract these new members?

The third option was to add new members to CTAG, even if their organizations did not become associated with SCCWRP Commission. Dr. Weisberg stated that CTAG had recommended this option, if the Commission chose not to add new members to the Commission. They had identified three organizations they would like to invite to send a representative to CTAG: 1) The stormwater research consortium described earlier, 2) the California Coastal Commission, and 3) the California Department of Fish and Game.

DISCUSSION:

After a lengthy discussion, the Commissioners decided to focus on recruiting the major stormwater agencies. There was discussion about adding private sector and environmental advocacy groups, but the decision was made to limit participation to public agencies at the present time given the structure of the JPA, the desire to keep the Commission to a manageable size, and the greater commonality of issues and agendas with present members. There was considerable discussion about the potential for inviting the Department of Fish and Game as a new member, but the consensus was against it at the present time. Commissioner Stahl suggested that we needed to walk before we run and adding too many new members at once would make the transition more difficult. The Commission did indicate that CTAG could invite the Department of Fish and Game and/or the Coastal Commission to participate in their meetings, if they desired and if they could identify participants who had an appropriate scientific background.

The Commissioners next discussed how many and which stormwater organizations should be invited to join SCCWRP. Consensus was reached that each of the present discharger members

of SCCWRP has a stormwater counterpart and that invitations should initially be limited to these counterpart organizations. Commissioner Cheng stated that the City of Los Angeles' stormwater department was under the same jurisdiction within City government as the Environmental Monitoring Division so there was no need for his organization to issue to identify a separate counterpart organization, but he agreed with the strategy of inviting counterpart stormwater agencies to join. The counterpart organizations were identified as the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, the County of Orange, and San Diego County Environmental Health Department, all of which are principal stormwater permittees.

The discussion continued regarding financial contributions that would be expected from new members, voting status for new members and the recruitment process. The consensus was to invite the stormwater agencies to participate as associate members. The contribution would be set at approximately \$50-100K, low enough not to be a barrier, but high enough to represent a commitment. Associate members would participate in Commission proceedings as non-voting members. Both the present Commission and the invitees could jointly assess whether an invitation to full membership, with a financial contribution more comparable to present members, would be in all parties interest. Questions were raised about the change in voting balance between regulators and dischargers if they were invited as full members. Several Commissioners indicated that they were unconcerned about the change in voting balance, but were concerned with keeping the number of Commissioners to a manageable size. It was agreed that the voting balance and Commission size issues could be deferred to a future time after sufficient experience with the new structure.

Commissioner Stahl suggested that recruitment should initially take place by informal conversation between present members and their stormwater counterparts. This would be followed by a properly noticed action item at the next Commission meeting to issue a formal invitation.

Broke for lunch at 12:00pm.
Commissioner Langworthy left.
Back from lunch break at 1:00pm.

Following lunch, Commissioner Stahl provided a summary of the items outlined above to ensure that a consensus opinion had emerged. Hearing agreement, he asked Dr. Weisberg to draft letters of invitation to the identified organizations for formal Commission approval and signature at the December Commission meeting. He also asked that the Commissioners initiate a dialog with their counterparts prior to the next Commission meeting so that they can report out on the candidates level of interest in joining SCCWRP.

3. ORGANIZATION SIZE AND FACILITY NEEDS

Dr. Weisberg reviewed the financial history of SCCWRP over the last five years, indicating that revenue had grown almost three fold. He pointed out that staff size had grown only 10% during the same period. Dr. Weisberg indicated that he has accommodated much of the revenue growth by subcontracting large portions of the external funds, particularly for commodity portions of the work. Still, the staff is overloaded and he will have to decline several pieces of additional work of potential interest to the organization unless more staff are added. Dr. Weisberg indicated that he foresaw enough revenue sources to potentially double the size of the organization and was seeking input from the Commission as to the desired size of the organization. He went on to outline a few of the considerations and challenges associated with increasing staff size.

A larger SCCWRP staff would allow the organization to add expertise and expand the number of topic areas to work on. More staff would also enhance redundancy, making SCCWRP less vulnerable to the departure of an individual employee. The downside of a larger staff is that it requires more funding. Since the JPA establishes a fixed level of core funding, a larger staff would have to be supported by more external contracts. As SCCWRP becomes increasingly dependent on outside contract funds, it loses some ability to establish its own research agenda. SCCWRP also becomes more vulnerable to economic downturns.

More staff would require additional administrative support, probably to include creation of a Deputy Director position. More staff would also require SCCWRP to obtain larger or additional facilities since the present space is already crowded. The present lease expires in 16 months and any new build-out would cost in excess of \$500K.

DISCUSSION:

The Commissioners discussed the issues raised, but concluded that size of the staff and facility requirements were operational issues delegated to the Executive Director. They expressed satisfaction with the direction that Dr. Weisberg was taking the organization while offering two cautions. First, growth should occur in an orderly manner which does not compromise the quality of the work being conducted and which considers the balance between core and contract funds. Second, the types of projects and clients used to fuel any growth should be ones that are consistent with the SCCWRP mission and ensure unbiased science. Dr. Weisberg stated that he felt comfortable adhering to these cautions and indicated that his intention would be to increase the size of SCCWRP only if the stormwater agencies joined the agency and increased the base funding, so as not to allow the organization to become overly dependent on external funds.

4. EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Dr. Weisberg stated that SCCWRP's most important asset is its high-quality scientists. Recently SCCWRP has begun to have difficulties retaining some of its top employees, as well as attracting new ones. The problem appears to be associated with the high cost of living in southern California. Employee retention has become a more important issue for SCCWRP as it has changed its mode of operation over the last five years. SCCWRP's projects are now more mission-oriented, more collaborative with other organizations and more typically funded with external contract dollars. This requires quickly replacing departing employees, which is expensive and time consuming.

Dr. Weisberg summarized the monetary and non-monetary actions taken to enhance employee retention and attraction over the last five years. They were replacing salary step increases with a performance-based system, increasing the upper end of salary ranges, implementing a bonus plan, enhancing the 403b program, increasing employee development activity and promoting staff events.

Dr. Weisberg presented several potential future actions for attracting and retaining essential employees. He recommended increasing salaries to selected key employees as the primary mechanism. Although the upper end range for many job categories was raised three years ago, salaries were not raised accordingly. As a result, 65% of our Scientist-track staff are still below the mid-point of their salary range. Also, the survey was not adjusted for the cost of living in the Los Angeles/Orange County area.

DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Coe raised the question as to how many employees were at the upper end of their salary range and whether that was a limiting factor. Dr. Weisberg responded that few employees were at the upper end of their range. He was asked if there was any action that the Commission needed to take or whether the issue could be resolved by adjusting salaries within the framework of his existing authority. Dr. Weisberg indicated that he thought the present structure was adequate, but that he was looking for guidance as to whether SCCWRP's strategy should be to pay below average salaries because it can attract employees based on the interesting work that it conducts, above average salary levels to attract top employees, or market level salaries as a compromise between these extremes. After a short discussion, the Commissioners were in accord on adjusting salaries to market levels for key employees. Commissioner Stahl recommended that since the issue could be accommodated within the existing authority of the Executive Director, that it be turned over to the Personnel and Finance Committee for specific action.

5. OTHER BUSINESS AND COMMUNICATIONS

There were none.

6. FUTURE MEETING AGENDA ITEMS

Follow-up on the open discussion items at the next Commission meeting.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no requests.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Stahl adjourned the meeting at 2:40 p.m.

ATTEST:

Bryan Nece
Secretary