

**Minutes of the Regular Commission Meeting of the
Southern California Coastal Water Research Project Authority (SCCWRP)**

**Held at the offices of the Authority:
3535 Harbor Blvd., Costa Mesa, California 92626**

September 11, 2020

9:00 AM

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Ellen Blake — *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9*
Karen Mogus — *State Water Resources Control Board*
Mark Gold — *California Ocean Protection Council*
Renee Purdy (Vice Chair)— *Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Jason Bill — *Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board*
David Barker — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Mas Dojiri — *City of Los Angeles*
Robert Ferrante — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Jim Herzberg — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Peter Vroom — *City of San Diego*
Arne Anselm — *Ventura County Watershed Protection District*
Paul Alva — *Los Angeles County Department of Public Works*
Amanda Carr — *County of Orange*
Todd Snyder (Chair) — *County of San Diego*

STAFF PRESENT

Stephen Weisberg — *Executive Director*
Bryan Nece — *Administrative Officer*
Wes Beverlin — *Legal Counsel*
Ken Schiff — *Deputy Director*
John Griffith — *Department Head*
Alvina Mehinto — *Department Head*
Eric Stein — *Department Head*
Martha Sutula — *Department Head*
Charles Wong — *Department Head*
Robert Butler — *Research Technician*
Elizabeth Fassman-Beck — *Principal Engineer*
Minna Ho — *Scientist*
Syd Kotar — *Research Technician*
Scott Martindale — *Communications Director*
Raphael Mazor — *Principal Scientist*
Karen McLaughlin — *Senior Scientist*
Joshua Steele — *Scientist*
Paul Smith — *Network Administrator*
Susanna Theroux — *Senior Scientist*
Kristine Taniguchi-Quan — *Scientist*
Janet Walker — *Scientist*

OTHERS PRESENT

Amber Baylor — *South Orange County Wastewater Authority*

Samuel Choi — *Orange County Sanitation District*

Christina Frieder — *UC Irvine*

Jill Harris — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*

Saundra Jacobs — *Santa Margarita Water District*

Chad Loflen — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*

Jeff Moneda — *Alternate Commissioner, County of San Diego*

Mitchell Mysliwicz — *Larry Walker Associates*

George Robertson — *Orange County Sanitation District*

Philip Markle — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*

Grant Sharp — *County of Orange*

Neil Searing — *County of San Diego*

Martha Tremblay — *Alternate Commissioner, Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*

Jared Voskuhl — *California Association of Sanitation Agencies*

Lan Wiborg — *Alternate Commissioner, Orange County Sanitation District*

Shelly Walther — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*

Tina Yin — *Alternate Commissioner, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9*

Commission Chair Mark Gold called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM.

Executive Director Weisberg described operating procedures for the remote meeting. Commissioners will be unmuted throughout the meeting, although he encouraged Commissioners to self-mute except when speaking. Audience members would be muted, but could ask to address the Commission by using the Zoom Q&A box. He asked that requestors identify the agenda items they want to speak about so that they could be called upon at the proper time, with time available for non-agenda items toward the end of the meeting (Agenda Item 15). Weisberg also indicated that Commission votes will be conducted via roll-call.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Minutes of Meetings Held June 5, 2020

2. Quarterly Financial Statement for the Period Ended June 30, 2020

3. Quarterly Statement of Investments at June 30, 2020

4. Minutes of CTAG Meetings Held August 13, 2020

Commissioner Dojiri motioned to approve Consent Items 1-4 with minor proofreading edits to the Commission's June 2020 minutes, and Commissioner Vroom seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion by roll call vote, with one abstention from Commissioner Bill.

REGULAR AGENDA

5. Personnel and Finance Committee Report

Peter Vroom, Chair of the Personnel and Finance Committee, reported that SCCWRP remains financially healthy and has not experienced a decrease in contracts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, although the organization foresees a possible drop-off in contracts over the next two or three years due to the pandemic. Vroom said SCCWRP is continuing to discourage staff from working in the building except when necessary to do their jobs; the average number of staff working in the building remains below 30%. Vroom said the Committee also discussed succession planning for SCCWRP.

6. Election of Commission Chair and Vice-Chair

Executive Director Weisberg explained that the Commission is required to elect a Chair and Vice Chair annually. He noted that the titles travel with the member agency, not the individuals. Historically, one Chair is from a regulated agency and the other is from a regulatory agency. While elections occur annually, the Commission Chair and Vice Chair typically serve two successive years. The current Chair and Vice Chair are completing their second year of service.

Commissioner Dojiri nominated Todd Snyder as Commission Chair, and Renee Purdy as Commission Vice Chair. Commissioner Gold seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion by roll call vote, with Commissioners Snyder, Purdy and Bill abstaining.

Commissioner Ferrante suggested that the Commission agenda the annual selection of the Chair and Vice Chair at its June Commission meeting going forward, to give Commissioners an opportunity to begin discussing who to nominate to these leadership posts in September.

Leadership of the meeting transitioned from Commissioner Gold to Commission Chair Snyder.

7. Future Meeting Dates

Executive Director Weisberg proposed holding the 2021 Commission meetings on March 5, June 4, September 3 and December 3. He explained that Commission meetings are historically held on Fridays, although the Commission is not obligated to hold its meetings on Fridays.

Commissioner Dojiri requested a modification to the proposed meeting dates and motioned to approve March 5, June 11, September 3 and December 10 as the 2021 meeting dates, and Commissioner Carr seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion by roll call vote unanimously.

8. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Weisberg welcomed two recently appointed Alternate Commissioners to their first Commission meeting: (1) Jeff Moneda, the newly hired Director of San Diego County's Department of Public Works, who was named an Alternate Commissioner in

August 2020, and (2) Tina Yin, Manager for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 9's Water Quality Standards and Assessment Section, who was named an Alternate Commissioner in December 2019. Both Alternate Commissioners said they looked forward to working with SCCWRP.

Weisberg introduced the three newest members of SCCWRP's staff: (1) Christina Frieder, who is finishing a postdoctoral program at the University of California, Irvine; Frieder is presently examining the potential of offshore kelp farming to serve as both a biofuel source and a management strategy for mitigating the impacts of coastal ocean acidification and will start at SCCWRP as a Scientist in February 2021 (2) Janet Walker, who just finished a joint Ph.D. program in ecology at the University of California, Davis and San Diego State University; Walker will start at SCCWRP as a Scientist in October 2020 and focus on developing ecological assessment tools for coastal wetland ecosystems; and (3) Syd Kotar, who is working toward her master of science degree at the University of Salamanca in Spain; Kotar started in July 2020 as a Research Technician in the Chemistry Department.

Weisberg reported that SCCWRP continues to thrive as an organization despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Weisberg said that building occupancy is being kept low to minimize in-person interactions among staff and, based on anonymous staff surveys, staff who work in the building report feeling safe. Staff productivity and morale remain high, with the number of scientific manuscripts authored by staff increasing during the pandemic compared to the same time last year. Weisberg stated the organization is preparing for a possible drop-off in contracts over the next two to three years.

Weisberg said that SCCWRP remains effective at bringing together SCCWRP member agencies and other partners for SCCWRP-facilitated meetings. The organization historically has hosted about 14 meetings per month, and has been hosting an average of about 12 remote, online meetings per month during the pandemic. Weisberg announced two high-profile, upcoming meetings. The first is hosting a five-part weekly webinar series beginning in October to provide a state of the science overview on the health effects of microplastics exposure; the webinar series will kick off a SCCWRP-facilitated workshop to develop international consensus on health effects thresholds for microplastics exposure. This series will, in turn, support California's efforts to develop improved monitoring and management strategies for aquatic microplastics pollution. The second high-profile meeting will be in October when SCCWRP will host a four-day expert panel workshop to begin updating recommendations for monitoring contaminants of emerging concern (CECs) in aquatic ecosystems. These workshop recommendations will update the recommendations from the SCCWRP-facilitated panel on this topic originally held in 2009.

Weisberg provided an update on SCCWRP's participation in a national study building capacity to monitor COVID-19 community infections by quantifying coronavirus in wastewater facilities. Weisberg said the COVID-19 surveillance study has the potential to pave the way for a more comprehensive, less biased means for monitoring community infections since it would not be based on individual testing from a subset of the population. Weisberg thanked SCCWRP's POTW member agencies – all of whom are participating in the study – and shared COVID-19 prevalence data published by the Sanitation Districts of Los

Angeles County. SCCWRP is part of a national research team working to optimize the sensitivity, precision and repeatability of the methods used to measure COVID-19 RNA, from preservation techniques to extraction methods to quantification via digital PCR (polymerase chain reaction) technology. SCCWRP also is working with partners to understand how raw quantification numbers in sewage correlate with community infection rates. Weisberg said SCCWRP is on schedule to obtain an initial data set from eight facilities by the end of September.

Commissioner Mogus stated the State Water Board has been working to launch a statewide COVID-19 wastewater surveillance project and is seeking support from the California Department of Public Health and partners from local public health departments. Mogus commented that progress forging these partnerships has been slow to date. Asked by Commissioner Purdy about building a statewide repository for these surveillance data, Mogus said the State Water Board has been working with the California Department of Public Health to build a statewide data reporting system. Commissioner Ferrante commented that the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County has been working closely with local public health partners, and noted that public health partners – before engaging further on the wastewater surveillance project – are interested in seeing more data on the relationship between community infection rates and COVID-19 levels in wastewater. Commissioner Herberg stated the Orange County Sanitation District has been in close communications with the Orange County Health Care Agency. Commissioner Gold commented that the California Department of Public Health likely will need a significant infusion of federal funds to make progress toward building a COVID-19 wastewater surveillance system.

9. CTAG Report

CTAG Chair Neil Searing reported that CTAG has experienced strong participation and attendance rates despite shortened online CTAG quarterly meetings. Searing said SCCWRP has developed a contracts portal on the CTAG-only section of SCCWRP's website enabling member agencies to review preliminary written material supporting upcoming SCCWRP contracts that will come before the Commission; the contracts portal will help CTAG review contracts that come in during the one-month gap between CTAG meetings and Commission meetings. Searing said CTAG has not been holding any intersessional research planning sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic because CTAG would prefer to meet in person. The next three intersessional research planning meeting include (1) the future research directions of the Toxicology Department, (2) contaminants of emerging concern (CECs) and microplastics, and (3) climate change and ocean acidification.

Searing said CTAG is recommending Commission approval of the one contract requiring Commission approval.

10. Contract Review

SCCWRP's Joint Powers Agreement requires Commission approval of contracts of more than \$250,000, and the State of California requests a resolution of acceptance for contracts exceeding \$100,000 offered by the State or Regional Water Boards. Weisberg recommended approval of the following contracts:

- 1) County of Orange (\$50,000)
 County of Los Angeles (\$50,000)
 County of San Diego (\$50,000)
 County of Riverside (\$50,000)
 County of San Bernardino (\$27,735)
 County of Ventura (\$35,000)
 City of San Diego (\$30,908)
 City of Los Angeles (\$30,908)
 City of Long Beach (\$25,000)
 Caltrans (\$30,000)
 SMC 2020-2021 Technical Support

Commissioner Purdy motioned to approve the above contracts and grants requiring Commission approval, and Commissioner Vroom seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion by roll call vote unanimously, with Commissioner Blake abstaining.

Weisberg presented the remaining four contracts, all of which have values of \$250,000 or less and thus do not require Commission approval. The contracts were presented to ensure consistency of the agency's directions with the Commission's intentions.

- 2) Stanford University (\$130,000)
 COVID19 Surveillance
- 3) UC Berkeley (\$5,000)
 Technical Editing
- 4) Chevron (\$7,000)
 Bight'18 Field and Laboratory Services
- 5) County of Orange (through Geosyntec) (\$138,215)
 Flow Conditions Study
- 6) Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (\$100,000)
 West Coast Ocean Data Portal

The Commission did not raise any objections to the contracts.

11. Stormwater Monitoring Coalition's 10-year Stream Biological Assessment

Principal Scientist Mazor provided an overview of the Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Coalition's (SMC) regional stream monitoring program, which focuses on bioassessment-based approaches for monitoring watershed health and has been occurring annually since 2009. SMC stream monitoring - facilitated by SCCWRP - is a coordinated, integrated regional program comprised of 16 organizations including nearly all of SCCWRP's regulated and regulatory member agencies. The program's biggest accomplishments include: (1) an unparalleled data set nationally in terms of consistency,

density, and impact; (2) the ability to develop leading-edge, scientifically robust assessment tools, and; (3) a non-adversarial forum for collaboration and dialogue for addressing the biggest issues and concerns to improve watershed health. The SMC's watershed survey data have been used for the southern California portion of the State's Perennial Stream Assessment reports, is a key element of each Regional Board's 305(b)/303(d) Integrated Reports, created an unparalleled foundation for causal assessment – a fundamental yet technically challenging need for determining the stressors that impact stream health – and, is used by several watershed Water Quality Improvement Plans as a focal point for targeting success. The SMC's regional stream survey has been the primary calibration and validation data set for the development of California's premier assessment tools, the California Stream Condition Index (CSCI) and Algal Stream Condition Index (ASCI). Recently, the SMC has been pushing the limits of data technology by developing a data portal that conjoins the federated data sets of the participating organizations, automatically calculates CSCI and ASCI index scores, and offers management-friendly options for visualizing data on stream health.

Commissioner Gold commented that improved coordination is needed between SMC monitoring and similar efforts in Northern California. Asked by Commission Chair Snyder about restoration efforts in modified channels, Mazor stated bioassessment data to assess the effectiveness of such restoration efforts are limited nationally and especially in southern California, although the SMC is considering focused data collection on this exact topic. Commissioner Carr expressed support for this research, emphasizing that managers need to know whether restoration efforts in modified channels have the potential to improve stream biology.

12. Bioassessment Implementation at Regional Board 9 and at the State Water Board

CTAG Past Chair Loflen, a Senior Environmental Scientist for the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, provided a Regional Board perspective on the role and value of bioassessment. Loflen said bioassessment is foundational to the Regional Board's approach to assessing waterbody health and protecting beneficial uses; chemistry alone is insufficient. The Regional Board incorporates bioassessment into a wide variety of regulatory programs, including cleanup programs, Sediment Quality Objectives, and 303(d) listings and TMDLs (total maximum daily loads). Loflen said the Regional Board has developed a three-tiered assessment framework that begins with a screening-level landscape assessment, followed by a rapid field assessment using the California Rapid Assessment Method, and finally an intensive bioassessment-based assessment that uses quantitative bioassessment scoring tools. Loflen said the Regional Board in 2018 unveiled draft biological objectives (bioobjectives) and subsequently revised them to exclude hardened channels for the time being; a public hearing on the revised bioobjectives is expected to be scheduled in November. Loflen said the Regional Board also is supportive of SCCWRP's efforts to develop bioassessment tools for nonperennial streams, and to use environmental DNA to gain insights into biological integrity. Other Regional Board priorities include understanding how bioassessment-based approaches will be impacted by climate change.

Commissioner Mogus delivered the second half of this presentation, focused on providing the State Water Board's perspective on the role and value of bioassessment. Mogus said the State Water Board decided to combine what was originally a parallel effort to develop a statewide biointegrity policy and a separate biostimulatory policy. The combined biointegrity-biostimulatory policy will be developed initially for streams, then expanded to other waterbody types. To support the policy's development, the State Water Board has assembled a stakeholder advisory group and a technical team that includes SCCWRP. The State Water Board's priority is to develop robust tools that are applicable statewide and have consistent thresholds, although the State Water Board is considering exempting hardened channels from the policy. Mogus said the State Water Board is in the process of developing options for crafting the combined biointegrity-biostimulatory policy, and is hoping to develop an outline of the draft policy by spring 2021. While the policy remains under development, the State Water Board already has used bioassessment data to identify and categorize streams in good biological condition.

Commission Chair Snyder commented that there generally appears to be consistency between the State and Regional Board approaches to incorporating bioassessment into regulatory decision-making. Asked by Snyder what would happen if the State Water Board and the Regional Board ultimately developed different biointegrity standards, Mogus and Loflen said the Regional Board standards would likely take precedent (assuming the Regional Board standards are more stringent), particularly if State policy provides a carve-out for Regional Board-specific standards. Asked by Commissioner Gold if the decision to exclude hardened channels from proposed biointegrity policies might dampen momentum for restoring these channels, Loflen said the Regional Board does not intend to discourage such restoration projects, and pointed out that such projects are often motivated by more than just a desire to improve water quality (for example, they also can be a way to enhance groundwater recharge). Asked by Commissioner Carr if Regional Board-driven restoration of hardened channels might compromise their flood protection benefits, Loflen replied restoration activities would only move forward at sites where this wouldn't be a concern.

13. Other Business and Communications

None

14. Future Meeting Agenda Items

Executive Director Weisberg said the Commission expressed interest last year in focusing its September 2020 meeting around ocean acidification (as well as a presentation on SCCWRP's microplastics work), and focusing its December 2020 meeting around microbial water quality. The Commission subsequently decided to focus its September 2020 meeting on stream bioassessment instead. Weisberg said both OA and microbiology remained timely themes for the December 2020 meeting. Commissioners expressed support for delaying the OA-focused topics until March 2021, and moving forward with a microbiology theme for December 2020 – specifically, updates on (1) the COVID-19 wastewater surveillance study, (2) an ongoing effort to quantify possible exfiltration from San Diego County sanitary sewer pipes, and (3) an ongoing study in Newport Bay to determine if the water-quality standard to protect shellfish from bacterial contamination has been appropriately set.

15. Public Comments

None

16. Adjournment

Commission Chair Todd Snyder adjourned the meeting at 11:36 AM until the next Commission meeting on December 4, 2020 at 9:00 AM.

Attest:

Bryan Nece
Secretary