

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

**Held at the
Offices of the Authority**

**Thursday, May 17, 2007
8:30 a.m.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Janet Hashimoto - US Environmental Protection Agency, Region IX
Darrin Polhemus and Liz Haven - State Water Resources Control Board
Deb Smith and Jon Bishop - Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region
Jerry Thibeault - Regional Water Quality Control Board, Santa Ana Region
Arthur Coe and John Robertus - Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Diego Region
Rita Robinson and Mas Dojiri - City of Los Angeles
Steve Maguin and Bob Horvath - Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts
Robert Ghirelli and Ed Torres - Orange County Sanitation District
Alan Langworthy - City of San Diego
Diego Cadena - Los Angeles County Department of Public Works
Larry McKenney - County of Orange
Cid Tesoro and Kathy Flannery - County of San Diego

STAFF PRESENT

Stephen Weisberg - *Executive Director*
Kenneth Schiff – *Deputy Director*
Bryan Nece - *Administrative Officer*
Art Barnett - *Principal Scientist*
Steven Bay - *Principal Scientist*
Eric Stein - *Principal Scientist*
Jim Allen - *Principal Scientist*
Larry Cooper - *Information Systems Manager*
Shelly Moore - *Information Management Supervisor*
Karen McLaughlin - *Scientist*
Karlene Miller - *Communications Specialist*
Richard Marsh - *Attorney*

OTHERS PRESENT

Gerry McGowen - *City of Los Angeles, Chair CTAG*
Dominic Gregario – *State Water Resources Control Board, Vice Chair CTAG*
Joe Gully - *County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County*
George Robertson - *Orange County Sanitation District*
Jamie Rimphanli - *Orange County Sanitation District*
David F. Thomas - *Ventura County Watershed Protection Division*
Mike Connor – *San Francisco Estuary Institute*
Brock Bernstein - *Consultant*

1. WELCOME AND PURPOSE OF WORKSHOP

Commissioner Polhemus called the meeting to order at 9:00 am with roundtable introductions. Mas Dojiri, Chair of the SCCWRP Strategic Planning Committee, provided introductory remarks about the purpose of the meeting and the agenda for the day, which included: 1) introductions; 2) summary of previous strategic planning meetings; 3) results of the Internal and External Effectiveness surveys; 4) structure of the SCCWRP Commission; 5) internal structure of SCCWRP; and 6) outreach. The Planning Committee Chair indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to generate discussion and provide input to the Executive Director about future directions of the organization. He indicated that the strategic planning meeting is also intended as the first step in preparing upcoming Joint Powers Agreement, scheduled for renewal in approximately two years.

2. RESULTS OF PREVIOUS STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOPS

Dr. Weisberg provided a review of the three previous strategic planning meetings held in 1994, 1997, and 2001. The 1994 strategic planning meeting yielded the Agency's mission statement and defined the organization's goals. Although this meeting was held prior to Dr. Weisberg's tenure at SCCWRP, he indicated that it has provided the guiding principles upon which he has directed the organization. The 1997 strategic planning meeting was a chance to review the new Executive Director's vision for the organization. This vision included placing a greater emphasis on data integration than on data generation, increasing the organization's publication rate, expanding the number of projects conducted in partnership with a wider range of organizations, and broadening the organization's funding base. As a result of that meeting and a shared vision between the Commission and the Executive Director, the number of employees with advanced degrees (Ph.Ds and M.S.) increased four-fold, the publication rate tripled, and the relative proportion of projects conducted in collaboration with outside agencies climbed from <5% to >90%. Currently, the funding base for SCCWRP is close to one-third member agency dues, one-third regulatory agency grants, and one-third other outside agency funds, up from a base of 98% member agency dues in 1997.

The 2001 strategic planning meeting examined the structure of the Commission and considered the addition of new members. As a direct result, four stormwater agencies from Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties became Associate Members of SCCWRP. In addition to these new members, CTAG also added a member from the California Coastal Commission to enhance relationship with coastal land use planning

3. SURVEY RESULTS

Commission Vice-Chair Dojiri indicated that although it had long been known that SCCWRP was doing an exceptional job of fulfilling the Commission's expectations, no data existed to quantify the organization's strengths and weakness or areas that could use improvement. As a result, the Strategic Planning Subcommittee created an Internal Assessment (for staff) and External Effectiveness (for outside SCCWRP) Surveys. Thirty staff members responded to the Internal Self-assessment survey, and 86 (out of 246) invitees responded to the External Effectiveness survey.

Dr. Dojiri described results of the External Effectiveness and Internal Self-Assessment surveys as being positive, with most responses ranking performance components between good and excellent. Rather than focusing on a question-by-question analysis of the survey results, Dr. Dojiri summarized areas for suggested improvement. He cautioned that while these are areas for potential improvement, they were defined as a larger proportion of "good" instead of "excellent" responses, as there were no areas in the survey where strong criticism had been received.

The Internal Self-Assessment survey identified four areas that could be improved: internal communication; staff recognition; staffing workload; and ensuring that SCCWRP avoids becoming a consulting firm.

Dr. Weisberg confirmed that the increase in staff and the move to a larger facility with more individual offices increases work efficiency, but brings increased challenges in maintaining effective communication among departments and individual staff members. Currently, agency-wide communication includes quarterly staff meetings and staff morale-boosting activities (i.e., picnics, ball games, etc.). Since moving to the new facility, some additional activities have already been instituted to increase communication (i.e., distribution of the Director's Report, staff exercise program, etc.). Dr. Weisberg indicated that based on the survey results, he will be instituting additional mechanisms to increase communication, including holding quarterly staff lunches in which 3 staff members will give 20 minute presentations on activities within their departments and encouraging staff to attend CTAG meetings. The Commission encouraged the Executive Director to investigate this issue further to determine where the breakdown in the communication chain was occurring (i.e., Executive management to Department heads, Department heads to staff, staff among different departments, etc.).

Dr. Weisberg indicated that there are several mechanisms in place for recognizing employee contributions. The most prominent of these is the year-end publication bonus system that was intended to acknowledge the accomplishments of staff and provide incentive for increased publication activities. To enhance employee recognition, Dr. Weisberg proposed that CTAG present recognition of excellence awards.

Dr. Weisberg acknowledged that although staff may be overworked at times, it was mostly a result of highly motivated scientists taking on additional projects of their own interest and volition. Executive management rarely forces additional projects on Departments, but many of the scientists find aspects of their work exciting enough to ask and act upon additional research opportunities that arise. Dr. Weisberg pointed to SCCWRP's low turnover rate as an indication that staffing/workload issues were not significant problems. There was a question about which level in the organization raised the overwork issue. Dr. Weisberg responded that he did not know because the survey was blind, but that he expected that it was the upper level scientists. In order to make sure this was the case, Dr. Weisberg indicated that he would engage individual staff members, particularly technician level staff, regarding their workloads. He also indicated that after consultation with his senior staff he had agreed to hire additional part-time employees to offload simpler tasks that sometimes consume large amounts of time. .

Dr. Weisberg indicated that of the four issues raised in the Internal Assessment Survey, the greatest amount of feedback was regarding the caution that SCCWRP not become too much like a consulting firm. He indicated that the organization routinely turns down more work than it accepts. Dr. Weisberg explained that the Agency only engages in contracts that provide a logical extension of its current commitments and presented a summary of the decision process used when considering potential contracts. SCCWRP considers contracts involving projects that are consistent with SCCWRP's current research plan, of interest to SCCWRP scientists and member agencies, and conducive to collaboration with other leading research organizations. He actively avoids contracts that include site-specific work, client approval of methods or data availability, regulatory oversight, or routine technological tasks that could be easily performed by consultants. Dr. Weisberg suggested that he prepare a document outlining these contract acceptance decision criteria for adoption by the Commission.

The External Efficiency survey identified four areas that could be improved: the need to foster more interaction with resource agencies; improve the timeliness of data availability; improve the quality of SCCWRP's website; and improve outreach as potential areas for improvement. The discussion regarding resource agencies was tabled until item 4: Structure of the SCCWRP Commission. The discussion regarding outreach was tabled until item 6: Outreach.

Dr. Weisberg addressed issues regarding timeliness and the SCCWRP website simultaneously. Dr. Weisberg's assessment was that the Agency is timely on most of its project except one: the Bight Regional Monitoring Project. The Agency rarely misses timelines associated with contract work and he has not received any negative comments from contract managers or project collaborators. He acknowledged that the remaining Bight'03 Reports were behind their anticipated schedule, but were still ahead of schedule compared to Bight'98. What was of equal or greater importance was the need to turn the Bight data into improved information. Currently, all of the Bight data can be downloaded via the web, but only as large and cumbersome data files. A Research Plan project has been added this year to create an improved website portal that allows for online querying of data in a GIS-based format. Dr. Weisberg also committed to working toward improving content and organization of SCCWRP's website with the possibility of incorporating a thematic orientation.

The Commission asked the Executive Director to post the results of the External Effectiveness survey to the SCCWRP website.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE SCCWRP COMMISSION

The Executive Director began a discussion about the future composition of the SCCWRP Commission by outlining the history of its membership. The original members of the SCCWRP Commission included the existing Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTW) member agencies. In the mid-1980's, the Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCB), State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), and US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region IX were added. The goal of adding the regulatory agencies as members was to create a better platform for dialog between the regulated and regulatory agencies about how SCCWRP's science should affect water quality management in southern California. After the 2001 strategic planning meeting, the stormwater agencies from Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties were brought on as Associate Members. Since stormwater issues were gaining importance, the Commission wanted to make sure these agencies were involved in the Commission's discussions. The Associate Member status allowed these agencies to join at 25% the cost of a full membership and includes full integration into SCCWRP research and staff, but comes without a formal vote on Commission items. Dr. Weisberg then described the advantages and disadvantages of altering the Commission structure. After much discussion, the Commission agreed to: 1) leave stormwater Associate Member status as is; 2) invite the California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) to a future Commission meeting to assess mutual interest in their participation in SCCWRP. The OPC was seen as a way to potentially address the interest expressed in the Effectiveness Survey about greater interaction with the resources agencies. Finally, there was discussion about SCCWRP's role in Statewide issues and whether the agency should consider establishing satellite offices in other parts of the State. Dr. Weisberg indicated a preference to not expand to other parts of the State, rather to form partnerships with entities already operating there. In specific, he pointed out the agency's positive relationship with the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI). He introduced Mike Connor, Executive Director of SFEI, who was in the audience. After discussion, the Commission endorsed the interactions with SFEI and asked Dr. Weisberg to continue interacting with SFEI to ensure that the two agencies share common visions on statewide issues.

5. SCCWRP'S INTERNAL STRUCTURE

The Executive Director led a discussion about the desired size, education level, and management structure of SCCWRP staff. Dr. Weisberg suggested that agency size should be a function of member financial contributions, so that SCCWRP does not grow so large as to become overly dependent on external contracts. Several Commission members expressed strong support for this position, wanting to ensure that the agency sets its own research direction. Dr. Weisberg suggested that the Agency's internal budget should be two to three times that of member contributions, providing a balance between agency independence and a desire to leverage its base funding.

As for internal structure, Dr. Weisberg indicated that the Agency presently employs 42 full-time employees, 18 of which have Ph.D.s. This employee count is up from 26 (4 with Ph.D.s) in 1996. He described the increased education level and ability to further the goal of increased data integration rather than data generation after the 1997 strategic planning meeting. However, he indicated that this has led to a suboptimal management ratio, with up to 10 employees being supervised by one Department head. He suggested that to create a more effective supervisor:employee ratio, the agency should create a new position of Supervising Scientist that has supervisory responsibility in specific project areas but does not have the larger management tasks of a Department Manager. After some discussion about the optimal ratio and duties of this position, the Commission asked the Executive Director to bring a proposal to the Commission's Personnel and Finance Subcommittee at their next meeting.

6. OUTREACH

The Executive Director led a discussion about SCCWRP's communication strategy and target audiences. He indicated that the Agency's principal outreach focus is on member agencies through mechanisms such as CTAG and Commission meetings, quarterly Director's reports and Annual Reports. The second tier target audience is non-member water quality agencies, which is oftentimes accomplished through participation in consortia such as the Stormwater Monitoring Coalition, Beach Water Quality Workgroup, Southern California Wetlands Recover Project, Southern California Coastal Ocean Observing System, and the Multi-agency Rocky Intertidal Network. The Agency also focuses its outreach activities in the scientific community through professional societies and journal publications since this, among other reasons, helps to build and maintain the Agency's scientific credibility. Additional outreach target audiences include environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These groups are important foci since they interact with our member agencies and are often included in our work on a project-by-project basis. The Agency pursues their involvement on project advisory committees and also interacts with them in personal visits to ensure they are aware of agency activities. Based on the 2001 strategic planning meeting, the Agency has not focused on outreach such as K-12 education and general public communication modes. Although this may occur through professional societies or through museum exhibits of SCCWRP research initiated by others, the Agency does not dedicate effort specifically toward that audience. The Commission agreed that the relative level of effort for outreach among the present target groups was appropriate.

7. OTHER BUSINESS AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Commission entertained the concept of altering the Agency's name. The Commission had previously altered the Agency's logo, but decided to not alter the name until the next JPA. After some discussion, the Commission agreed to the "Southern California Coastal Waters Research Partnership". This name better reflects the Agency's mission yet still retains the Agency's familiar acronym.

8. FUTURE MEETING AGENDA ITEMS

The Committee Chair summarized the goals, directions, and action items:

- 1) Results of the External Effectiveness survey will be posted to the SCCWRP website.
- 2) The Executive Director will produce a memo describing the contract acceptance decision process.
- 3) The Executive Director will invite a representative from the Ocean Protection Council to meet with the Commission at their September meeting.
- 4) The Executive Director will include the position of Supervising Scientist when submitting the next salary resolution to the Personnel and Finance Committee.
- 5) Discussion regarding coordination agreement between SCCWRP and SFEI will continue in the future.
- 6) The JPA renewal will be drafted using the name Southern California Coastal Waters Research Partnership.

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Audience member Brock Bernstein addressed the Commission stating that the Agency has been so prolific, it is difficult for stakeholders to stay up-to-date on all of the Agency's activities and findings. The Executive Director agreed to consider the following: 1) produce an informational brochure of the Agency's accomplishments for distribution to member agencies and the public; and 2) consider an all-day technical meeting, held near the release of the Annual Report, where SCCWRP scientists summarize important research findings for the year.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Polhemus adjourned the meeting at 3:20 p.m.

ATTEST:

Bryan Nece
Secretary