

**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**

**December 6, 2013
9:30 AM**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Cindy Lin *(for John Kemmerer)* — *US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region IX*
Vicky Whitney — *State Water Resources Control Board*
Sam Unger — *Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Hope Smythe — *Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board*
David Barker — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Mas Dojiri — *City of Los Angeles*
Grace Chan — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Robert Ghirelli — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Halla Razak — *City of San Diego*
Gerhardt Hubner (Vice-Chair) — *Ventura County Watershed Protection District*
Gary Hildebrand — *Los Angeles County Department of Public Works*
Mary Anne Skorpanich — *County of Orange*
Cid Tesoro — *County of San Diego*

STAFF PRESENT

Ken Schiff — *Deputy Director*
Bryan Nece — *Administrative Officer*
Wesley Beverlin — *Legal Counsel*
Steve Bay — *Principal Scientist*
John Griffith — *Principal Scientist*
Keith Maruya — *Principal Scientist*
Eric Stein — *Principal Scientist*
Steve Steinberg — *Principal Scientist*
Karen Setty — *Science Writer*

OTHERS PRESENT

Phil Friess — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Joe Gully — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Karen Larsen — *State Water Resources Control Board*
Tim Stebbins — *City of San Diego*

Commission Vice-Chair Gerhardt Hubner called the meeting to order at 9:34 AM. Hubner introduced Halla Razak as the new Commissioner and Public Utilities Director for the City of San Diego. Ken Schiff indicated Cindy Lin was appointed as a single meeting Alternate Commissioner for the EPA and Hope Smythe was the new Alternate Commissioner for the Santa Ana Regional Board. Both Commissioner Kuhlman and her alternate appointee

representing the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) were regrettably unable to attend the meeting.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Minutes of Meeting Held September 6, 2013

2. Quarterly Financial Statement for the Period Ended September 30, 2013

3. Quarterly Statement of Investments at September 30, 2013

4. Minutes of CTAG Meeting Held August 8, 2013

5. 2013 Financial Audit

Commissioner Ghirelli motioned to approve the consent items and Commissioner Whitney seconded the motion. The Commission approved it unanimously with Commissioner Lin abstaining.

REGULAR AGENDA

6. Personnel and Finance Committee Report

Commissioner Chan, Chair of the Personnel and Finance Committee, provided an update. The Committee discussed SCCWRP's annual audit and found all in order for the 15th year in a row. They recommended Commission approval of the audit.

7. Executive Director's Report

SCCWRP Deputy Director Ken Schiff provided a report, as Executive Director Steve Weisberg was invited to the Ocean Acidification International Coordination Centre in Monaco. As one of 25 international workshop participants, Weisberg was working to connect ocean acidification science with end users. Schiff continued to explain four additional responses to the Commission's request for SCCWRP to take an active role in ocean acidification research. First, SCCWRP was well represented on an OPC-run expert panel of 24 scientists advising the West Coast States on ocean acidification. Second, SCCWRP will host a nation-wide expert workshop the following week for developing ocean models to assess ocean acidification and hypoxia in southern California. Third, SCCWRP helped to plan the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation meeting in November, which prominently featured ocean acidification. Fourth, based on interactions with SCCWRP, the XPRIZE Foundation planned to follow the September launch of their \$2 million prize for an ocean pH-monitoring device with a secondary \$0.5 million prize for pH monitoring in coastal surface waters. SCCWRP member agencies will beta-test selected entrants' technologies.

Schiff continued his report by detailing four organizational updates. First, SCCWRP planned to undergo another strategic planning process, which in the past has always led to some organizational upgrade. An expert panel consisting of current and former national lab directors will meet February 5–7 to identify the biggest assets and recommended improvements at the Agency. Member agencies are invited to attend the first day to hear

testimony to the panel, and also to attend the last day when the panel provides an oral report of their findings. The chair of the panel will prepare a written report and present it to the Commission on May 1 at their strategic planning meeting. The Commission will receive a draft agenda for the strategic planning meeting for discussion at the regular March Commission meeting.

Second, Schiff reported that Weisberg was working with the Commission's Technical Advisory Group (CTAG) in response to the Commission's challenge to create a new CTAG Charter. Though a difficult exercise, it had good timing in coordination with the strategic planning process. Third, Schiff gave a personnel update. Christina Steidley was hired as a new administrative assistant and Julia Coates is a new shared postdoctoral fellow with the Ocean Science Trust. Julia's goal is to improve coordination between the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program (Bight '13) and the statewide Marine Protected Area (MPA) Monitoring Enterprise. Schiff lastly reported the 2013 SCCWRP Annual Report, to be released and distributed to the Commission in January, is the largest ever produced.

Commissioner Hubner asked about the Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Coalition (SMC) research agenda planning process. Schiff explained all projects from the previous SMC research agenda were completed and virtually all resulted in subsequent changes in stormwater management. To create a new SMC research agenda, SCCWRP facilitated a three-day workshop that included a multi-disciplinary panel of experts. Of the 21 new projects, many will infiltrate SCCWRP's Research Plan.

Commissioner Tesoro arrived at 9:45 AM. Commissioner Barker arrived at 9:52 AM.

8. CTAG Report

CTAG Vice-Chair Joe Gully provided a report in place of CTAG Chair Wanda Cross, who was unable to attend. CTAG's recommendations to the Commission included consideration and approval of all contracts as well as the stream bioassessment fact sheet. Gully asked if the fact sheet memo was still helpful to the Commission, and several Commissioners responded affirmatively. In addition, CTAG discussed future fact sheet topics, new meeting dates, research planning (including SMC and member agency interests), Bight '13, the CTAG charter, a new meeting discussion format, and the historical monitoring data committee (which will meet next quarter). Gully shared a few of the member agency research priorities, which were organized at the CTAG meeting according to geography as opposed to agency sector. Schiff commented that the geography-based format for research priorities was very helpful at producing integrated research needs assessment.

Regarding the CTAG charter, CTAG formed a subcommittee chaired by Bram Sercu whose aim is to produce a revised draft for CTAG in February, and a final version for the Commission strategic planning meeting in May. At Commissioner Skorpanich's request, Gully explained that the Executive Director wrote the first draft of the CTAG charter and CTAG is now helping SCCWRP revise that version.

CTAG utilized a new format for their primary agenda item on bio-objectives. The new CTAG format includes over two hours to cover both technical products and regulatory/policy implications. CTAG and SCCWRP both appreciated the new format, which will continue at their February meeting on sediment quality objectives indirect effects.

9. Contract Review

Schiff asked the Commission to approve a resolution regarding contracts offered to SCCWRP. Some require Commission action under SCCWRP's Joint Powers Agreement because the value exceeds \$250,000. In addition, the State of California requests a resolution of acceptance for those exceeding \$100,000 offered by the State or Regional Water Boards.

- 1) State Water Resources Control Board (\$255,000)
Nutrient Objectives
- 2) State Water Resources Control Board (\$181,000)
Nutrient Objectives

Commissioner Hildebrand motioned to approve the two contracts and Commissioner Unger seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion unanimously with Commissioners Whitney and Lin abstaining.

As an informational item, Schiff also presented contracts with a value of \$250,000 or less that SCCWRP has accepted or indicated a willingness to accept. While SCCWRP's governing agreement requires no Commission action on these, he presented them to ensure the agency's directions align with the Commission's intentions.

- 3) County of San Diego (\$100,000)
San Diego Pilot Surfer Wet Weather Epidemiology Study
- 4) US EPA (through ITSI Gilbane Company) (\$60,000)
Passive Sampling on Palos Verdes Shelf
- 5) County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County (\$21,450)
Assessment of Endocrine Disruption in Southern California Coastal Fish
- 6) Moss Landing Marine Laboratory/San Jose State (\$25,000)
Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program Special Studies

The Commission did not raise any objections to these contracts.

10. Biological Objectives

Ken Schiff gave the first of four presentations to update the Commission on progress towards the State's bio-objectives development. He explained one impetus for the work was the many streams on EPA's 303(d) list of impaired waterbodies, which were based solely on chemistry, but a map showed clear differences in the density of listed streams

among Regional Boards. The State Board wants to explore in-stream biology, which is closer to the beneficial use being affected, as a way to provide equity among regions. Commissioner Ghirelli asked if the program will carry over to marine waters and Schiff indicated the State would eventually like to apply biologically-based standards to all water bodies. Commissioners Unger and Whitney discussed similarities and difference in the Regional Boards' methodologies and practices for 303(d) listing. Schiff then explained the State Boards' eight-step biological objective development process, of which three were technical and the primary focus of SCCWRP research. The research included defining reference conditions, developing a scoring tool, and stressor identification.

Eric Stein presented SCCWRP's research on reference conditions whose aim is to define biological expectations in high quality streams. To identify the reference site network, SCCWRP compiled a 10-year bioassessment data set collected statewide and screened it based on landscape scale anthropogenic activities. The culmination was approximately 600 reference sites from Oregon to Mexico covering all of the major environmental gradients found in California. In response to a question from Commissioner Hubner, Stein clarified that the reference sites represent minimal human activity, rather than zero impact. He continued to explain the reference site selection criteria and options for areas with few reference sites such as the Central Valley. Stein concluded by explaining that a scientific advisory panel, consisting of the best aquatic ecologists in the country, worked with SCCWRP for several years reviewing and guiding the Agency's research.

Stein next presented SCCWRP research developing the new biological scoring tool, called the California Stream Condition Index (CSCI). Vastly improved over combining multiple regional Indices of Biotic Integrity (IBIs) independently developed across the state, the CSCI is a statewide tool thereby optimizing consistency (for equity and comparability) and site-specific biological expectations (for the widely varying ecological conditions throughout California). In response to Commissioner Tesoro's question about the status the CSCI, Stein explained that the CSCI has been developed, tested, and peer reviewed. Partners in southern California are currently using the tool; however, a major limitation for broad-scale application is the lack of an automated approach to calculate the CSCI. Commissioner Hubner asked about the skills and training needed to support field data collection, which Stein and Schiff stated follows the precedent used by the SMC.

Schiff presented stressor identification research, which will be needed when a stream is out of compliance with biological objectives. SCCWRP tested the EPA's Causal Analysis/Diagnosis Decision Information System (CADDIS) in four California case studies. The case studies followed CADDIS' five steps for building a weight-of-evidence to diagnose or refute specific causes of impairment for remediation. Based on the case studies, Schiff stated that CADDIS can work in California, but it is not perfect and needs several areas of further refinement. Commissioner Dojiri likened causal assessment to toxicity identification evaluation, an iterative process wherein sometimes the primary problem is masked and ongoing research has improved the technology over time. Commissioner Lin recommended SCCWRP continue working on building tools and guidance for stressor identification. In response to a question from Commissioner Chan, Schiff indicated

SCCWRP's interest in identifying biological expectations and causal assessments in modified streams.

Schiff finished by summarizing CTAG's biological objectives discussion, including regulatory options and key impediments. At Commissioner Whitney's request, Karen Larsen provided additional perspective from the State Board. Larsen explained potential approaches to addressing modified streams, including defining when streams should be excluded from regulatory objectives (the most prescriptive approach) or letting the Regional Boards deal with site-specific issues (the most flexible approach). In response to a question from Commissioner Hubner, Larsen explained the State Board's desire to not let reference streams degrade into the future. Commissioner Skorpanich asked Larsen for additional details on dealing with modified streams, which Larsen described as alternate waterbody designations (i.e., use attainability analysis), alternate regulatory thresholds for best attainable conditions, or adopting anti-degradation regulation to prevent further degradation of modified streams. Commissioner Ghirelli raised the regulatory option of implementing biological objectives in a subset of waterbodies such as unmodified streams. Without committing, Commissioner Whitney explained the State Board sometimes takes an incremental approach if new programs or policies are not ready for statewide application.

Commissioner Tesoro asked about application in non-perennial streams and Commissioner Unger answered that it should be feasible based on extensive discussions within his Regional Board. Commissioner Hildebrand commented on the huge cost of restoring modified streams like the Los Angeles River to a completely natural state. The Commission determined the guidance and tools developed by SCCWRP could also be useful for mitigation efforts. Larsen and Commissioners Barker, Skorpanich, and Unger discussed the interplay between chemistry and biology as factors in determining impairment, wherein biology may supersede chemistry depending on the stream's beneficial use. To conclude, Commissioner Hubner asked about next steps and Larsen explained the State Board is meeting with stakeholders to work through difficult policy implementation issues and intend to start writing a draft policy in the near future.

11. Fact Sheet

Commission Vice-Chair Hubner asked for general feedback on the draft stream bioassessment fact sheet, and Commissioner Skorpanich commented that it misses the target audience and is too technical and dense. She requested a lay presentation of the information including what represents "good" biological condition and how to compare sites. Commissioner Tesoro agreed the current version was not suitable for distribution to his board members and the Commission remanded the fact sheet to CTAG for further revision.

12. Future Meeting Agenda Items

Future meeting agenda items included:

- Report on the expert panel's organizational review
- Discussion of stream bioassessment fact sheet
- Update on sediment quality indirect effects assessment
- CTAG charter update

13. Other Business and Communications

Commissioner Lin announced the EPA had posted a new climate change adaptation plan. It was open for review through January 3 by the regional EPA offices and others, representing the first of several comment opportunities.

Commissioner Unger left at 11:52 AM.

14. Public Comments

No public comments were raised.

15. Adjournment

Commission Chair Hubner adjourned the meeting at 11:59 AM until the next Commission meeting on March 7, 2014.

Attest:

Bryan Nece
Secretary