

**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. Suite 110, Costa Mesa, California 92626**

**March 3, 2017
9:30 AM**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Janet Hashimoto — *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region IX*
Karen Larsen — *State Water Resources Control Board*
Jennifer Phillips (Vice-Chair) — *California Ocean Protection Council*
Sam Unger — *Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Kurt Berchtold — *Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board*
David Barker — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Mas Dojiri — *City of Los Angeles*
Robert Ferrante (Chair) — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Bob Ghirelli — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Peter Vroom — *City of San Diego*
Arne Anselm — *Ventura County Watershed Protection District*
Gary Hildebrand — *Los Angeles County Department of Public Works*
Amanda Carr — *County of Orange*
Jo Ann Weber — *County of San Diego*

STAFF PRESENT

Stephen Weisberg — *Executive Director*
Bryan Nece — *Administrative Officer*
Claire Hervey — *Legal Counsel*
Ken Schiff — *Deputy Director*
Steve Bay — *Principal Scientist*
John Griffith — *Principal Scientist*
Eric Stein — *Principal Scientist*
Steve Steinberg — *Principal Scientist*
Martha Sutula — *Principal Scientist*
Scott Martindale — *Communications Coordinator*

OTHERS PRESENT

Paul Alva (CTAG Chair) — *Los Angeles County Department of Public Works*
Jeff Armstrong — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Jim Colston — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Chris Crompton — *County of Orange*
Phil Friess — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*

Commission Chair Robert Ferrante called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

1. Minutes of Meeting Held December 2, 2016

2. Quarterly Financial Statement for the Period Ended December 31, 2016

3. Quarterly Statement of Investments at December 31, 2016

4. Minutes of CTAG Meetings Held February 9, 2017

Commissioner Hildebrand motioned to approve Consent Items 1-4 with minor revisions to the minutes, and Commissioner Dojiri seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

REGULAR AGENDA

5. Personnel and Finance Committee Report

Commissioner Bob Ghirelli, Chair of the Personnel and Finance Committee, reported that SCCWRP remains in a strong position financially, with revenues exceeding expenditures as of the midpoint of the fiscal year, and healthy long-term projections. Ghirelli said the Committee heard a report regarding options for SCCWRP to increase investment yields, and indicated that the Committee will be bringing forward a proposal for Commission endorsement at the next meeting. Chair Robert Ferrante thanked Administrative Officer Bryan Nece for researching the investment options and said SCCWRP will be able to get better investment returns going forward.

Ghirelli said Commission Chair Robert Ferrante briefed the committee on the outcomes of the Executive Director's annual performance review and Weisberg's goals for the coming year. Ghirelli said the committee also worked during the past quarter to draft the Executive Director's next employment contract, covering the period July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2021 and is recommending its approval when it is up for consideration later in the Commission agenda.

6. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Weisberg presented a number of metrics that reflect SCCWRP's organizational successes over the past year. He summarized the 2016 Annual Report's Snapshot of Success, a two-page executive summary that the Commission suggested creating two years ago. He discussed SCCWRP's success building and maintaining scientific credibility, and noted that SCCWRP exceeds publication and citation rates for many leading academic research institutions. He noted that SCCWRP is a particularly effective consensus-builder, holding 115 external leadership roles and publishing scientific papers with more than 100 institutions from more than 20 countries over the past three years. Weisberg said SCCWRP continues to be a leader in influencing management and in providing long-term support to end users of SCCWRP science. Weisberg also discussed SCCWRP's successes with its communications program, including the SCCWRP Annual Report that was redesigned three years ago with a target audience of the Board members of Commissioners. Weisberg also noted that the 2017 SCCWRP Symposium, held two days prior, was based on an idea by the Commission a decade ago to enhance communication between SCCWRP staff and its member agencies. Chair Ferrante said he thoroughly enjoyed the 2017 Symposium and encouraged his fellow Commissioners to talk to their staff about

what they got out of the Symposium and how it could lead to new collaboration opportunities with SCCWRP.

Weisberg reported on SCCWRP partnerships with other scientists and organizations as additional measures of SCCWRP success. He said that SCCWRP is presently hosting two visiting scientists – one from China and the other from South Korea – who will be spending their one-year sabbaticals at SCCWRP. Weisberg announced that UC Irvine has selected SCCWRP as a partner for a new UC initiative exploring stormwater remediation approaches, and that UC Irvine engineering researcher Dr. Stanley Grant will be spending part of his upcoming sabbatical at SCCWRP. Weisberg also reported that SCCWRP continues to serve as host of national workshops, including an upcoming harmful algal blooms conference April 25-27. Commissioner Janet Hashimoto commented that the HABS workshop will be an important opportunity for participants to get up to speed on the state of the science and what research and support systems are needed to ensure public health protection. Finally, Weisberg reported that he was pleased to see the level of influence that SCCWRP science had in informing the direction of a February 22 State Water Board workshop on emerging contaminants. He noted that the State Water Board recently asked SCCWRP to reconvene an expert advisory panel to develop recommendations regarding screening approaches for receiving water and recycled water; the original panel convened by SCCWRP was instrumental in focusing attention on bioanalytical screening tools. Weisberg also updated the SCCWRP Commission on the study to assess anti-biotic resistance bacteria (aka “superbugs”) in wastewater treatment plants, currently scheduled for June sampling.

7. CTAG Report

CTAG Chair Paul Alva reported that during CTAG elections in February, Alva was elected Chair, Phil Markle was elected Vice Chair, and former Chair Greg Gearheart rotated to Past Chair. Alva said CTAG has re-formed a subcommittee to examine whether effectiveness of best management practices (BMPs) should be elevated to a SCCWRP research theme. Alva said CTAG reviewed the proposed contracts and were supportive, but none they reviewed this quarter require Commission approval.

8. Contract Review

As an informational item, Weisberg presented four contracts, all of which have values of \$250,000 or less and thus do not require Commission action. The contracts were presented to ensure consistency of the agency’s directions with the Commission’s intentions.

- 1) County of San Diego (through Brown Caldwell) (\$30,000)
County of San Diego (through Brown Caldwell) (\$150,000)
Wet Weather Source Tracking
- 2) State Water Resources Control Board (through Cal State Sacramento) (\$12,780)
Stormwater Strategic Initiative Technical Advisory Committee
- 3) Innovaprep, Inc. (\$28,699)

Rapid Concentration for Improved Detection of Microbes in International Space Station Potable Water

- 4) ExxonMobil and Total, Inc. (\$50,000)
DNA barcoding and bioinformatics standardization

Asked by Commissioner Mas Dojiri about the Innovaprep contract, Principal Scientist John Griffith said Innovaprep will house a researcher at SCCWRP this summer to explore how to use DNA-based microbial contamination detection technology to monitor water being recycled at the International Space Station.

The Commission did not raise any objections to the contracts.

9. Vulnerability of Coastal Wetlands to Sea Rise

Principal Scientist Eric Stein explained that coastal managers invest large sums of money into restoring and preserving coastal wetlands as valuable ecological resources, but that those investments are vulnerable to sea level rise (SLR) effects. To help managers understand how the 104 Southern California Bight coastal wetlands could be impacted by SLR, SCCWRP and its partners are developing a system for evaluating vulnerability and likely ecological changes within each system, and ultimately assigning wetlands a vulnerability score. This will provide managers with information to help them select among three main types of management actions: (1) facilitating migration of wetlands to upland areas, (2) managing water levels through gates and other infrastructure, and (3) promoting sediment accretion to raise wetland elevation. Stein emphasized that managers have multiple decades to develop management strategies to combat the threat of SLR.

Asked by Commissioner Unger about how biodiversity was being valued in the modeling work, Stein said SCCWRP is focusing on the biological responses of wetland communities, which includes biodiversity. Asked by Commissioner Vroom about how researchers could communicate SLR to naysayers and skeptics, Stein said SCCWRP is partnering with NOAA, USGS, and other groups that specialize in communicating science to a more general audience. Executive Director Weisberg added that SCCWRP also is exploring virtual reality as a platform for communicating the effects of SLR, and encouraged Commissioners to look at an early prototype of this system while they were at SCCWRP today. Asked by Commissioner Hashimoto whether the modeling considers potential restoration of wetlands that don't presently exist, Stein said not at present, but this was one of the possibilities being explored.

Commissioner David Barker commented that the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board will be considering a climate change resolution linked to SLR. Commissioner Jennifer Phillips commented that the Ocean Protection Council is scheduled to finish a comprehensive update to its SLR guidance documents by January 2018.

10. ELAP Review

Weisberg provided an update on the progress of the Expert Review Panel that is assessing the State of California's Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP). After

conducting an initial assessment of the program in late 2015, the Panel developed a series of recommendations aimed at significantly overhauling the program. The Panel was reconvened during a three-day meeting at SCCWRP (January 31-February 2) to assess whether ELAP was effectively implementing the Panel recommendations and whether those changes had led to an improved program. The Panel concluded that ELAP has made significant progress, especially with adopting a management system, improving training for staff, and interacting with clients. However, the Panel also found that staff still require extensive training, that ELAP has not yet adopted a formal accrediting standard, and that ELAP has not identified a viable path forward to clear a significant backlog of laboratories awaiting accreditation. The Panel developed three primary additional recommendations to help ELAP continue to progress in the future.

Asked by Chair Ferrante if the new ELAP accreditation standards could force smaller labs to close, Weisberg said the State Water Board has been clear that all labs, regardless of size, must meet high quality standards to maintain accreditation. Commissioner Karen Larsen commented that the State cannot risk allowing the production of environmental data that are not defensible in court; she also said that labs that have gone through accreditation under the revamped program have reported that it was worth their time investment.

11. Enhancing the Quality and Access to Long-term Monitoring Data Sets

CTAG Representative Jeff Armstrong reminded the Commission that they had asked CTAG to develop recommendations about the value, and investment necessary, to keypunch and standardize the member agency long-term monitoring data sets that date back decades. Armstrong identified the many potential benefits of having that data and that the ability to compile it will decline as many of the people responsible for collecting the early data have or will soon retire. Armstrong described the labor-intensive steps that would be required to compile the long-term data sets, estimating that labor costs for creating these data sets would be 400 to 4,000 hours for each POTW, and under 100 hours for stormwater management agencies since most of their data is more recent. Armstrong on behalf of CTAG is seeking direction from the Commission on whether and how to proceed, but recommended four data sets (two for POTWs and two for stormwater agencies) that would be good test cases to proceed with. Those test cases would allow the member agencies to assess whether their time estimates are accurate and to assess if the potential benefits of having those data sets are realized.

Commissioner Dojiri expressed concern that some of the data were collected prior to initiating intercalibration exercises, and that subsequent intercalibrations revealed poor data comparability. Armstrong responded that compiling the long-term data would require a QC assessment and the data limitations would need to be acknowledged. Armstrong reiterated that one of the QC costs of creating the long-term data sets is standardizing taxonomic nomenclature, which many of the agencies have already instigated resulting from SCCWRP's regional monitoring efforts.

Commissioner Amanda Carr suggested that one possibility to lessen distraction of their staff would be for the member agencies to hire student interns or temporary workers who would be managed by SCCWRP. Weisberg indicated that he was open to that option.

Commissioner Ghirelli motioned to encourage CTAG to move forward with a pilot study aimed at enhancing member agencies' long-term monitoring data sets, and Commissioner Carr seconded the motion. The Commission unanimously approved the motion.

Armstrong said the CTAG subcommittee has appointed Danny Tang of the Orange County Sanitation District to facilitate the project going forward. The Commission requested a progress report in six months.

12. Executive Director's Contract

Commissioner Ghirelli motioned to approve the Executive Director's contract with one minor revision for clarification, and Commissioner Hildebrand seconded the motion. The Commission unanimously approved the motion.

13. Other Business and Communications

None.

14. Future Meeting Agenda Items

Weisberg initiated a discussion about long-range planning for Commission meeting agendas, explaining that Commissioners hear three types of topical presentations: (1) descriptions of SCCWRP research that typically follow from areas of CTAG interest or review, (2) topics related to timely management issues for which SCCWRP research can contribute to decision-making, and (3) briefings about emerging issues of management relevance, not all of which are oriented around SCCWRP research, but for which SCCWRP scientists have topic area expertise. Weisberg presented the results of an online poll of the topics that Commissioners most want to hear in 2017. He then presented a 2017 straw man schedule that he and Chair Ferrante created by parsing out the top vote-getters among each of the three remaining 2017 Commission meetings. To fill out the straw man schedule, Weisberg and Ferrante inserted additional topics suggested by individual Commissioners. Commissioners expressed support for the four topics proposed for the June meeting: (1) SCCWRP bioassessment/biostimulatory research, (2) use of bioassessment scores for 303(d) listings, (3) environmental flows, and (4) the California Ocean Science Trust's five-year assessment of the condition of South Coast Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Weisberg indicated that Commission meetings typically have time for just three topic areas, but the Commissioners agreed to start their June meeting a half-hour earlier than usual (9 a.m. instead of 9:30 a.m.) to accommodate all four presentations.

Commissioner Unger asked if the bioassessment/biostimulatory presentation could include an update on bioaccumulation work, which Weisberg felt would be better served by an independent presentation at a future meeting. Commissioner Hashimoto suggested that during the presentation on the EPA's proposed new cyanotoxin criteria (tentatively slated for December 2017), the discussion could be broadened to include other issues related to harmful algal blooms (HABs), which Weisberg indicated made sense.

Commissioners also provided suggestions regarding the list of proposed topics that Weisberg and Ferrante did not place into the 2017 straw man schedule: Commissioner

Phillips suggested prioritizing the topics centered around climate change, as there will be action this year on climate change issues. Commissioner Larsen suggested prioritizing the Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Coalition toxicity comparability assessment studies, as a state toxicity amendment is on track to be considered for adoption this fall by the State Water Board.

Commissioner Ferrante concluded the discussion by asking for Commissioners to continue giving him offline suggestions as he still has the flexibility to include last-minute items on future agendas, as necessary.

15. Public Comments

No public comments were raised.

16. Adjournment

Commission Chair Ferrante adjourned the meeting at 12:10 PM until the next Commission meeting on June 2, 2017 at 9:00 AM.

Attest:

Bryan Nece
Secretary