

**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**

**June 5, 2020
9:00 AM**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Ellen Blake— *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9*
Karen Mogus — *State Water Resources Control Board*
Mark Gold (Chair) — *California Ocean Protection Council*
Renee Purdy — *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*
Robert Ferrante — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Jim Herberg — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Peter Vroom — *City of San Diego*
Daniel Lafferty — *Los Angeles County Department of Public Works*
Amanda Carr — *County of Orange*
Todd Snyder (Vice 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*
Jhenevieve Cabasal — *Laboratory Assistant*
Kelcey Chung — *Research Technician*
Elizabeth Fassman-Beck — *Principal Engineer*
Leah Thornton Hampton — *Scientist*
Katie Irving — *Scientist*
Heili Lowman — *Scientist*
Scott Martindale — *Communications Director*
Raphael Mazor — *Principal Scientist*
Karen McLaughlin — *Senior Scientist*
Ashley Parks — *Scientist*
Paul Smith — *Network Administrator*
Joshua Steele — *Scientist*

Kristine Taniguchi-Quan — *Scientist*
Jennifer Taylor — *Scientist*
Susanna Theroux — *Senior Scientist*
Amy Zimmer-Faust — *Scientist*

OTHERS PRESENT

Jeffrey Armstrong — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Betty Burnett — *South Orange County Wastewater Authority*
Samuel Choi — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Chris Crompton — *Alternate Commissioner, County of Orange*
Daniel Ellis — *State Water Resources Control Board*
Lisa Frigo — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Natalie Grayson — *Public*
Jill Harris — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Saundra Jacobs — *Santa Margarita Water District*
Mark Kawamoto — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Chad Loflen — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Philip Markle — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Nikos Melitos — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Tom Merrell — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Pedro Morais — *Public*
George Robertson — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Neil Searing — *County of San Diego*
Roya Sohanaki — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Martha Tremblay — *Alternate Commissioner, Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Shelly Walther — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Lan Wiborg — *Alternate Commissioner, Orange County Sanitation District*
Christina Yin — *Alternate Commissioner, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9*

Commission Chair Mark Gold called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

Executive Director Weisberg welcomed Commissioners and audience members to SCCWRP's first remote Commission meeting. He said that Commissioners will be unmuted throughout the Zoom meeting, although he encouraged Commissioners to self-mute except when speaking. Weisberg indicated that audience members would be muted and instructed those wishing to address the Commission to use the Zoom Q&A box to request to speak indicating what agenda items they want to speak about so that they could be called upon at the proper time. Weisberg said there will also be an opportunity for audience members to speak on general topics during the public comment period toward the end of the meeting (Agenda Item 14).

Weisberg said that all Commission votes will be cast via roll-call voting, and that all of the roll-call votes will take place at one time toward the end of the meeting.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Minutes of Meetings Held March 6, 2020

2. Quarterly Financial Statement for the Period Ended March 31, 2020

3. Quarterly Statement of Investments at March 31, 2020

4. Minutes of CTAG Meetings Held May 14, 2020

Commissioner Carr motioned to approve Consent Items 1-4, and Commissioner Dojiri seconded the motion. The Commission agreed to delay a roll-call vote on the consent agenda until later in the meeting.

REGULAR AGENDA

5. Personnel and Finance Committee Report

Commissioner Vroom, Chair of the Personnel and Finance Committee, reported that SCCWRP remained in strong financial health despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. SCCWRP is planning to make a 3.1% cost-of-living adjustment to staff salary ranges effective July 1, 2020. Although SCCWRP is experiencing some project delays and is preparing for potential reductions in State funding, SCCWRP does not anticipate long-term funding challenges. Vroom said the Committee also began discussing a long-term succession plan for key SCCWRP personnel. Vroom said the Committee has reviewed and recommended approval of all contracts (Agenda Item 8), including a contract from an anonymous philanthropic foundation.

6. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Weisberg began his remarks by introducing three new SCCWRP staff members: (1) Scientist Leah Hampton, who recently earned her Ph.D. from the University of North Texas and will work as a SCCWRP toxicologist, (2) Scientist Heili Lowman, who recently earned her Ph.D. from the University of California, Santa Barbara and will specialize in data analysis/visualization, and (3) Research Technician Kelcey Chung, who recently earned her master's from the University of California, Irvine and will help lead SCCWRP's use of a scanning electron microscope for studying biological impacts of ocean acidification.

Weisberg said the adversities of the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled SCCWRP to gain new insights into the strengths and dedication of its staff. He said staff productivity remains as high as it has ever been because SCCWRP scientific staff are so passionate about their work, and because IT and administrative staff have made the transition to remote work seamless for everyone. Weisberg said SCCWRP has successfully hired and onboarded three full-time staff during the pandemic, and has successfully worked out mutually agreeable revisions to project schedules with its clients when necessary. Weisberg said SCCWRP has tentatively begun moving forward with planning meetings again beginning in October 2020; it is not yet clear if they will be in person or remote. He noted that the Commission's strategic planning retreat – originally scheduled for early 2021 – will be postponed until Commissioners can meet in person again.

Weisberg discussed SCCWRP's participation in a national study working to use wastewater influent to track the prevalence of COVID-19 infections in communities. The study has the potential to provide a way to monitor community infection rates that is not dependent on test results from the biased subset of the population being tested. Weisberg said the study's goal is to assess trends at individual POTW facilities, compare infection rates across sewersheds, estimate the number of infected individuals, and learn how to track infection spikes back to individual sub-watersheds, such as a college dormitory complex. SCCWRP is playing a key role in developing methods for sampling, collection and viral RNA extraction, and also is working with the manufacturer of an advanced RNA quantification technology known as droplet digital PCR (polymerase chain reaction) to improve measurement sensitivity. All four of SCCWRP's POTW member agencies are contributing samples for the study.

Commission Chair Gold commented that he was heartened to see the level of foresight, planning and collaboration that has gone into the study, with both SCCWRP and POTWs proactively stepping up to the plate. He said the study is being discussed at the highest levels of science, including the National Academy of Sciences. Commissioner Ferrante commented that the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County started working in April 2020 to quantify viral loads in district influent samples, and has learned through this process that there are not yet standardized viral measurement methodologies – a shortcoming that Ferrante said SCCWRP is well-suited to help address.

Department Head Griffith commented that recent upgrades to SCCWRP's laboratory facilities – as well as sufficient access to personal protective equipment – will ensure that SCCWRP will be able to adhere to all biosafety protocols.

Asked by Commission Vice Chair Snyder about who is coordinating with local public health departments, Gold said the point person is Mark Starr, Deputy Director of Environmental Health for the California Department of Public Health.

7. CTAG Report

CTAG Chair Neil Searing reported that CTAG originally had planned to review SCCWRP's Sediment Quality and Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CECs) research themes this year, but that those had been delayed due to COVID as all agreed that those are better done in person. Searing said that a CTAG subcommittee that has been working to validate a coupled physical-biogeochemical ocean model for the West Coast is continuing to meet online, but a second subcommittee examining model applications has been suspended awaiting directions that the OPC and State Water Board wish to take with their most recent contract to SCCWRP.

Searing reported that CTAG recommends Commission approval of SCCWRP's 2020-2021 Research Plan Executive Summary. CTAG also recommends approval of the SCCWRP contracts that CTAG reviewed at its May 2020 meeting.

8. Contract Review

Weisberg requested that three contracts be added to the agenda that were not available to SCCWRP at the time this agenda was prepared.

- 7) Ocean Protection Council (\$225,236)
Microplastics in Wastewater Streams
- 8) Anonymous Philanthropic Foundation (\$532,284)
Developing an eDNA Benthic Infaunal Index
- 9) Anonymous Philanthropic Foundation (\$47,184)
Developing a Conceptual Model for Environmental Fate of eDNA

Commissioner Ferrante motioned to allow the three contracts to be added to the agenda, and Commissioner Carr seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion by roll call unanimously, with Commissioner Blake abstaining.

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) Los Angeles County (\$800,000)
Stormwater BMP Performance Index
- 2) State Water Resources Control Board (\$1,000,000)
Develop and Standardize Bioanalytical Screening Tools
- 3) Ocean Protection Council (\$998,600)
Application of Integrated Earth System Model to assess Anthropogenic Nutrient Impacts on OAH
- 7) Ocean Protection Council (\$225,236)
Microplastics in Wastewater Streams
- 8) Anonymous Philanthropic Foundation (\$532,284)
Developing an eDNA Benthic Infaunal Index

Commissioners held an in-depth discussion about Contract #3. Commissioners Ferrante and Herberg expressed concerns that although they had reviewed a written description of the scope of work for Contract #3, the full contract text was not yet available to review. Weisberg explained that SCCWRP frequently does not have final contracts in place at the time they come before the Commission for approval; Commission Chair Gold noted that the California Ocean Protection Council needs the Commission's vote of approval before they can bring Contract #3 to his Board for approval. Weisberg said that the Commission's vote on contracts is intended to convey to SCCWRP whether the work is appropriate for SCCWRP; the Commission delegates responsibility to the Executive Director to review full

contract language and sign and enter into SCCWRP contracts. Commissioners Ferrante and Herberg also expressed concerns that the recent dissolution of the CTAG subcommittee that had been providing input on applications for the ocean acidification and hypoxia (OAH) model would limit SCCWRP member agencies' opportunities to review and help shape the development of scenarios being run through the model. Commissioner Mogus stated that although the CTAG decided to suspend the modeling applications subcommittee, Board staff still intend to use CTAG to solicit feedback from SCCWRP member agencies about the model runs and their interpretation. Weisberg echoed this sentiment, explaining that the modeling applications work that SCCWRP is doing is broader than what is outlined in Contract #3 and that CTAG will be asked to review all of SCCWRP's scenario-based modeling work. Ferrante and Herberg expressed appreciation to Weisberg and fellow Commissioners for addressing their concerns about Contract #3.

Commissioner Vroom motioned to approve the above contract and grants requiring Commission approval, and Commissioner Dojiri seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion by roll call unanimously, with Commissioner Mogus abstaining on Contract #2 and Commissioner Blake abstaining on all.

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.

- 4) San Diego County (through Geosyntec) (\$50,000)
San Diego County (through Wood) (\$50,000)
- 5) Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County (\$26,000)
San Gabriel River Habitat Management Committee
- 6) Anonymous Philanthropic Foundation (\$60,518)
Second National eDNA Conference
- 9) Anonymous Philanthropic Foundation (\$47,184)
Developing a Conceptual Model for Environmental Fate of eDNA

The Commission did not raise any objections to the contracts.

9. Fiscal Year 2020/2021 Research Plan and Budget

Deputy Director Schiff provided an overview of SCCWRP's 2020-2021 Research Plan Executive Summary, which contains high-level summaries of dozens of ongoing and planned research projects and programs. He highlighted a few areas where SCCWRP is investing: (1) SCCWRP is working to build foundational understanding of the relationship between the HF183 genetic marker for human fecal contamination and health risk; (2) SCCWRP is looking at how to measure microplastic pollution in aquatic environments and working to understand biological impacts; (3) SCCWRP is building its new research theme focusing on the effectiveness of stormwater BMPs (best management practices); and (4) SCCWRP is participating in a national study working to use wastewater influent as a

surveillance tool for monitoring community COVID-19 infection rates. Schiff said the Research Plan Executive Summary is supported by a much more detailed, comprehensive set of documents that form SCCWRP's full thematic Research Plan. These detailed documents are developed and updated via a collaborative process with CTAG; Schiff said this process has been going well.

Commissioner Dojiri motioned to approve the research plan and budget, and Commissioner Smythe seconded the motion. The Commission agreed to delay voting on this item until later in the meeting.

10. Resolution Establishing Rules Governing Compensation, Benefits, and Personnel, Policies and Procedures

Executive Director Weisberg introduced SCCWRP's 2020-2021 Salary Resolution by reviewing the changes from last year's resolution, which were minor.

Commissioner Lafferty motioned to approve the resolution, and Commissioner Carr seconded the motion. The Commission agreed to delay voting on this item until later in the meeting.

11. California Statewide Flow Criteria Development

As the meeting was running long, the Commission agreed to hear this presentation after Agenda Items 12, 13 and 14. Department Head Stein introduced this presentation by explaining that alterations to hydrologic flows in California are a predominant stressor impacting ecological health of streams statewide. A group of hydrology researchers that includes SCCWRP has been working for the past three years to develop the California Environmental Flows Framework to help managers develop flow target recommendations using consistent, robust science. The framework relies on the concept of functional flows – specifically, a set of quantifiable metrics that explains the magnitude, timing, duration and frequency of flows at different times of the year. Instead of setting environmental flow targets that attempt to restore “natural” flows, the framework helps managers focus on restoring key functional components of these flows. Already, SCCWRP has been test-driving this framework in two case studies – one in the Los Angeles River and another in south Orange County.

Commission Chair Gold commended the workgroup on the development of this environmental flows framework to support an often politically charged subject. Executive Director Weisberg echoed these sentiments, noting that it is particularly challenging to develop an approach for setting environmental flows that is applicable across geographically diverse California.

12. Other Business and Communications

(none)

13. Future Meeting Agenda Items

Executive Director Weisberg suggested revisions to a previous plan for Commission meeting topics through the end of 2020 – primarily as a result of pandemic-related changes

to project schedules. Weisberg said that although the Commission originally planned to focus on ocean acidification-related topics at its September 2020 meeting, he suggested focus on bioassessment instead, and instead of focusing on microbiology topics in December 2020, Weisberg suggested the meeting's theme be acidification.

Commissioners indicated support for these revisions. Commission Chair Gold suggested tightening presentations as much as possible if the meetings will be conducted remotely.

14. Public Comments

Executive Director Weisberg invited audience members participating in the meeting to address the Commission. No audience members spoke.

The Commission agreed to vote on Agenda Items 1, 9 and 10, which the Commission previously delayed voting on. An individual roll call vote was conducted for all three items. The Commission approved Agenda Items 1, 9 and 10 unanimously, with Commissioner Blake abstaining on Item 9.

15. Adjournment

Commission Chair Mark Gold thanked Commissioners for participating in SCCWRP's first remote Commission meeting. He adjourned the meeting at 11:31 AM until the next Commission meeting on September 11, 2020 at 9:00 AM.

Attest:

Bryan Nece
Secretary