

**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 11, 2021
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*
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*
Lan Wiborg — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Peter Vroom — *City of San Diego*
Arne Anselm — *Ventura County Watershed Protection District*
Daniel Lafferty — *Los Angeles County Department of Public Works*
Amanda Carr — *County of Orange*
Todd Snyder (Chair) — *County of San Diego*

OTHER COMMISSIONERS

Justine Kimball — *California Ocean Protection Council*
Tina Yin — *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9*
Martha Tremblay — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Chris Crompton — *County of Orange*

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*
Scott Martindale — *Communications Director*
Elizabeth Fassman-Beck — *Principal Engineer*
Raphael Mazor — *Principal Scientist*
Paul Smith — *Network Administrator*
Nina Bednarsek — *Senior Scientist*
Susanna Theroux — *Senior Scientist*

Karen McLaughlin — *Senior Scientist*
Faycal Kessouri — *Senior Scientist*
Bowen Du — *Scientist*
Joshua Steele — *Scientist*
Kristine Taniguchi-Quan — *Scientist*
Jan Walker — *Scientist*
Christina Frieder — *Scientist*
Leah Thornton Hampton — *Scientist*
Kylie Langlois — *Senior Research Technician*
Syd Kotar — *Research Technician*
Emily Darin — *Research Technician*
Kristine Gesulga — *Research Technician*

The opening slide described the operating procedures for the remote meeting, which was conducted via Zoom. Audience members were invited to address the Commission by making a request via the Zoom Q&A box.

Commission Chair Todd Snyder called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM

CONSENT AGENDA

- 1. Minutes of Meetings Held March 5, 2021**
- 2. Quarterly Financial Statement for the Period Ended March 31, 2021**
- 3. Quarterly Statement of Investments at March 31, 2021**
- 4. Minutes of CTAG Meetings Held May 13, 2021**

Commissioner Carr motioned to approve Consent Items 1-4 with minor edits to the Commission's March 2021 minutes, and Commissioner Mogus seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion by roll call vote.

REGULAR AGENDA

5. Personnel and Finance Committee Report

Peter Vroom, Chair of the Personnel and Finance Committee, reported that SCCWRP remains in strong financial health, expecting to end 2020-2021 about \$200,000 in the black and with four months of cash reserves. SCCWRP has a strong revenue funnel for the upcoming two years, with revenues expected to be higher next year than this year. An auditor is preparing to conduct an annual financial audit of SCCWRP. Vroom said SCCWRP is on track to have its next Joint Powers Agreement signed by all signatories by the end of June, which will extend the agency's existence for an additional five years. Vroom said there are no major changes to SCCWRP's annual salary resolution; there will be a 1.6% cost-of-living adjustment for all salary ranges for 2021-2022, plus additional adjustments to accommodate increases in the statewide minimum wage. Vroom said the Committee drafted the Executive Director's next employment contract. Vroom said the Committee

discussed SCCWRP's phased reopening plan, which kicks off June 15; staff will be expected to return to the office in August, and visitors will be welcome when invited by a specific staff member.

Asked by Commissioner Gold about the expectations for attendance at future Commission meetings, Vroom said the issue has been agendaized for the next Personnel and Finance Committee meeting. Commissioner Carr encouraged SCCWRP to look into a newer type of conferencing webcam that can swivel and zoom in on the person speaking.

Vroom said the Committee recommends approval of all SCCWRP contracts (Agenda Item 8), SCCWRP's 2021-2022 Research Plan and Budget (Agenda Item 9), and the Executive Director's contract (Agenda Item 11).

6. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Weisberg reported that Commissioner Zaldivar recently left his job with the City of Los Angeles and that Barbara Romero is expected to be confirmed in the coming weeks as Zaldivar's replacement. Weisberg introduced SCCWRP's three newest full-time employees: Emily Darin, a Research Technician in the Toxicology Department; Kristine Gesulga, a Research Technician in the Biology Department; and Kylie Langlois, a Senior Research Technician in the Microbiology Department. Weisberg said SCCWRP has successfully transitioned to hosting remote meetings and cited multiple recent examples, including two multi-part meetings focused on microplastics (one to standardize microplastics measurement methods, and the other to develop health thresholds for microplastics). He also said the organization was active in planning national and international scientific conference that are of interest to SCCWRP member agency staff, such as harmful algal blooms (HABs) and beach water quality. SCCWRP also will co-host an upcoming international workshop on coastal wetland resiliency.

Weisberg announced that SCCWRP is planning to resume holding in-person meetings. In early 2022, SCCWRP is planning to host a national scientific conference on transitioning environmental DNA technology to management applications, as well as an international conference on urban stormwater modeling. Weisberg said he also is working with CTAG to plan for the next SCCWRP symposium, an all-day open house for SCCWRP member agency staff to learn about SCCWRP research.

Weisberg said that the Commissioners should have already received SCCWRP's newly published Annual Report, which is themed around the past two decades since SCCWRP formalized its partnership with the stormwater management community; publication of this document follows the publication of a history book about SCCWRP's first 50 years that was developed for SCCWRP's 50th anniversary celebration in 2019.

Weisberg said Department Head Stein recently briefed the State Water Board about the Los Angeles River Flows Project that will serve as a statewide template for how the State can set environmental flow requirements under the wastewater change petition process; SCCWRP successfully brought together diverse stakeholders and helped the group reach consensus on the underlying science. Asked by Commissioner Gold about final work

products from the L.A. River Flows Project, Department Head Stein said that final project reports, minutes and other documents are available on a webpage on the SCCWRP website, and SCCWRP also is developing a web-based data tool for modeling the impacts of altering environmental flows. Asked by Gold how reduced runoff to the L.A. River as a result of enhanced infiltration was factored into the analysis, Stein said it was indirectly considered by assuming green infrastructure will reduce runoff volumes. Commissioners Purdy and Blake requested that Stein do a briefing with their staffs on the project; Commissioner Lafferty already requested a briefing. Asked by Commissioner Carr how the L.A. River project is related to a similar project in southern Orange County, Stein said the technical approach is essentially the same.

Weisberg said SCCWRP is working with its member agencies to create a more streamlined supplemental environmental project (SEP) strategy, similar to what Region 2 has created. Commissioner Barker said his agency supports the conversations that are underway in Region 9 to enable SEP funding to be used for regional monitoring work; Commissioner Purdy said Region 4 also is interested in having these conversations.

7. CTAG Report

CTAG Chair Choi reported that CTAG Past Chair Searing will be leaving CTAG before the end of his term to take a new position and that CTAG would be discussing how to fill the Past Chair leadership position. Choi said CTAG Representative Jason Bill has been replaced by Jason Freshwater. CTAG will continue to meet remotely at least through next quarter, and will aim to resume intersessional research planning meetings and schedule the next SCCWRP symposium in early 2022. CTAG will prioritize holding an intersessional planning meeting for SCCWRP's Regional Monitoring research theme, so this research area can be discussed prior to the kickoff of the 2023 cycle of the Southern California Bight Regional Marine Monitoring Program. CTAG also is continuing to work with SCCWRP to develop a potential new Environmental Risk Assessment research theme, with SCCWRP staff expected to present a more fully fleshed out research plan to CTAG this fall.

Choi said CTAG recommends approval of the contract requiring Commission approval (Agenda Item 8) and approval of SCCWRP's 2021-2022 Research Plan (Agenda Item 9).

8. 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 (\$52,881)
County of Los Angeles (\$52,881)
County of San Diego (\$52,881)
County of Riverside (\$52,881)
County of San Bernardino (\$45,603)
County of Ventura (\$47,368)
City of San Diego (\$38,042)

City of Los Angeles (\$38,042)
City of Long Beach (\$26,443)
Caltrans (\$41,116)
SMC 2021-2022 Technical Support

After hearing this agenda item, the Commission agreed to delay voting on this item until later in the meeting, to combine this roll-call vote with other agenda items.

Weisberg presented the remaining two 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) NOAA (through USC) (\$10,000)
SCCOOS HABs Newport Beach Pier Sampling
- 3) City of San Diego (\$8,132)
Bight OA Sample Analysis

The Commission did not raise any objections to the contracts.

9. Fiscal Year 2021/2022 Research Plan and Budget

Deputy Director Schiff explained that the Commission is being asked to approve SCCWRP's 2021-2022 Research Plan Executive Summary, an overview document that is supported by much longer, more technical documents for each of SCCWRP's eight research themes. Schiff highlighted SCCWRP's one-year-old Stormwater BMPs research theme, which is growing rapidly as SCCWRP takes on projects with all of its stormwater management agencies. SCCWRP also is contemplating adding a ninth research theme that will focus on risk assessment. Schiff said SCCWRP staff's research priorities within each research theme are generally well-aligned to CTAG's.

Commissioner Gold expressed reservations about SCCWRP getting involved in cost-benefit analyses associated with environmental risk assessment because it is such a contentious, complex arena – a sentiment echoed by Commissioners Purdy, Mogus and Wiborg. Schiff said he shares the Commissioners' concerns and will proceed cautiously, working closely with CTAG, in developing this potential research theme.

Asked by an anonymous attendee about whether SCCWRP intends to update its Sediment Quality Objectives tools, Weisberg said that SCCWRP had phased out its Sediment Quality research theme as the key objectives had been accomplished, but was available to update sediment quality tools if that was a priority for its member agencies.

After hearing this agenda item, the Commission agreed to delay voting on this item until later in the meeting, to combine this roll-call vote with other agenda items.

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

Executive Director Weisberg said the changes to SCCWRP's annual Resolution are minor. Salary ranges for staff have been adjusted upward by 1.6%, and additional adjustments have been made to comply with California's minimum-wage law.

After hearing this agenda item, the Commission agreed to delay voting on this item until later in the meeting, to combine this roll-call vote with other agenda items.

11. Executive Director's Contract

The Commission discussed the new five-year contract that was being offered to Executive Director. Weisberg said he is proud to be celebrating his 25th anniversary of service to SCCWRP.

Commissioner Purdy motioned to approve Agenda Items 8-11, and Commissioner Vroom seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion by roll call vote with Commissioner Blake abstaining.

12. COVID-19

Scientist Steele began his presentation by explaining that the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed interest in wastewater surveillance as a strategy for monitoring the spread of community infection. SCCWRP has been working to build capacity statewide to routinely monitor the SARS-CoV-2 virus in wastewater influent by understanding how to optimize data collection and analysis activities. SCCWRP, in collaboration with numerous partners, has made considerable progress to date in understanding how to collect and use wastewater surveillance data. SCCWRP is playing a leadership role on a Committee of the California Water Quality Monitoring Council (CWQMC) that is examining this topic. The Committee is expecting to see reliance on wastewater surveillance data increase as clinical testing rates decrease, a priority identified among the Public Health Departments, and has developed a detailed, four-pronged set of recommendation for how to increase the sensitivity of wastewater monitoring methods (because improved sensitivity will be key to increasing management confidence in wastewater data).

Asked by Commissioner Ferrante if the methods would be used to monitor specific sub-sewersheds and specific buildings, such as a single student dormitory, Weisberg said the CWQMC Committee has not prioritized this type of monitoring because of potential hurdles, including privacy concerns. Commissioner Vroom echoed Weisberg's point, noting that communication and ethical concerns come into play. Commissioner Dojiri said routine monitoring at dozens of sites also could become cost-prohibitive. Asked by Commissioner Smythe if researchers are working to use data to predict future outbreaks, Weisberg replied that wastewater surveillance is capable of detecting community outbreaks on average at least three days earlier than clinical testing, and two weeks earlier than hospitalizations.

13. Microplastics Methods Evaluation

Executive Director Weisberg introduced the next two presentations by explaining that microplastics has presented challenges for the research community on two fronts: Needing to standardize laboratory methods for measuring microplastics, and figuring out how to

develop health-based biological thresholds for microplastics exposure. Researchers around the world have been working together to tackle these issues.

Department Head Wong introduced the first presentation by explaining that two pieces of State legislation mandate that California develop a strategy for monitoring microplastics. While multiple measurement methods have been developed, the research community has not yet come together to compare methods efficacy and standardize methods. SCCWRP facilitated bringing together microplastics researchers from around the world to participate in an intercalibration study involving five microplastics measurement methods. About 40 laboratories with different skill levels were sent blind samples with known microplastics quantities and asked to measure them. Initial results show that there can be considerable variability among laboratories, but that this variability is reduced with better training and adherence to best practices. The work, which is ongoing, has prompted thoughtful, in-depth management conversations about how to implement routine microplastics monitoring statewide, how to improve the reliability of measurement data, how to weigh the time and cost associated with these activities, and how to think ahead toward possible development of thresholds for microplastics.

Asked by Commissioner Wiborg if it is possible to identify specific sources of microplastic particles in a matrix, Wong said it is possible to identify the chemical properties of each particle and that these signatures can be used to help identify sources. Asked by Commissioner Gold how reliably particles of different sizes can be measured, Wong said existing methods are more effective when measuring particles larger than 200 microns, but accuracy is low for particles smaller than 20 microns. Asked by an audience member if researchers would have designed the intercalibration study differently knowing what they know now, Weisberg said there were two things we learned that should affect future studies. The first is that the health effects portion of the workshop taught us that characterizing the total plastic mass by size category was more important than characterizing the size, shape, color, polymer type of each particle, and the second is that the time cost for implementing the particle specific methods is very large. As such, future studies should include evaluation of alternative, less expensive methods that focus on measuring total plastics. Scott Coffin, a Research Scientist for the State Water Board, said his agency agrees and is considering an initial two-year monitoring program that encourages use of alternative less expensive methods as part of a larger tool kit. He indicated that the State Water Board's draft monitoring plan that is based on the outcomes from the SCCWRP study would be released later this summer.

14. Microplastics Health Effects

Department Head Mehinto introduced this presentation by explaining that once researchers can reliably measure microplastics levels, the next challenge is understanding the health thresholds at which exposure to this contamination can be expected to adversely affect aquatic organisms and humans. Mehinto focused on chronicling how researchers have been working through a multi-part workshop to develop international scientific consensus for an initial set of microplastics thresholds for aquatic organisms. Mehinto described the toxicology studies that researchers are examining, the process and frameworks that researchers have been using to develop thresholds based on the studies,

and the four-tiered threshold framework that researchers have decided to develop. Each threshold tier of the management framework is linked to a specific set of management responses. Mehinto said that researchers also examined the feasibility of building a comparable threshold framework for humans and drinking water, but concluded that there are not yet enough studies that have generated appropriate data to serve as the foundation for such an effort.

Asked by Commission Chair Snyder if the thresholds will be site-specific, Mehinto said researchers are looking to set thresholds that will have global applicability, but the tools that are being built would be conducive to reanalysis for California-specific taxa if desired. Asked by CTAG Representative Phil Markle how researchers are accounting for microplastics measurement uncertainty in developing health thresholds, Weisberg said the key is to quantify uncertainty so that management frameworks can appropriately account for it. Mehinto added that the threshold development team has good processes in place for evaluating the confidence associated with various toxicology studies. Asked by an audience member if the thresholds are aligned with risk assessment work done by the California Ocean Science Trust, Weisberg said yes. He added that the OST report outlines a general approach and that this work adds the tools required for implementation. Asked by an audience member how the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) is involved in this work, Weisberg responded that OEHHA's lead on this topic was part of the workshop team. Scott Coffin, a Research Scientist for the State Water Board who is the main client for this project, said the State Board is coordinating closely with OEHHA on the drinking water threshold development, but reinforced Mehinto's statement that more studies are needed before the State is ready to issue drinking water regulatory thresholds.

15. Other Business and Communications

None

16. Future Meeting Agenda Items

Executive Director Weisberg reminded the Commission that they previously planned a microbiology theme for the September 2021 Commission meeting, including presentations on the northward march of pathogenic *Vibrio* bacteria, the development of thresholds to determine how much of the HF183 human fecal marker is too much, and assessments of the relationship between *Enterococcus*-based beach water-quality monitoring and coliphage-based monitoring. Commissioner Carr requested that this meeting also include an agenda item on the investigative order to identify the sources of fecal contamination in San Diego-area watersheds.

Commissioner Purdy suggested that the December 2021 Commission meeting focus on environmental flows, which other Commissioners agreed with.

Weisberg said he recommends that the Commission's strategic planning meeting – which has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic – be planned for spring 2022.

Commission Chair Snyder said the Commission's Personnel and Finance Committee will be discussing whether Commission meetings should include a remote attendance option going forward – and said that this discussion will likely start prior to the next Commission meeting in September.

Commissioners expressed support for the proposed agenda topics for the next two Commission meetings.

17. Public Comments

None

18. Adjournment

Commission Chair Todd Snyder adjourned the meeting at 11:38 AM until the next Commission meeting on September 3, 2021 at 9:00 AM.

Attest:

Bryan Nece
Secretary