

**Minutes of the Regular Commission Meeting of the
Southern California Coastal Water Research Project Authority (SCCWRP)**

Meeting held remotely via zoom

December 2, 2022

9:00 AM

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Ellen Blake — *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9*
Karen Mogus — *State Water Resources Control Board*
Renee Purdy (Chair) — *Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board*
David Barker — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Mas Dojiri — *City of Los Angeles*
Martha Tremblay — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
James Herberg — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Ryan Kempster — *City of San Diego*
Arne Anselm — *Ventura County Watershed Protection District*
Keith Lilley — *Los Angeles County Department of Public Works*
Grant Sharp — *County of Orange*
Crystal Benham — *County of San Diego*

OTHER COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Lan Wiborg — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Jo Ann Weber — *County of San Diego*
David Gibson — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*

STAFF PRESENT

Stephen Weisberg — *Executive Director*
Bryan Nece — *Administrative Officer*
Wes Beverlin — *Legal Counsel*
Ken Schiff — *Deputy Director*
John Griffith — *Department Head*
Eric Stein — *Department Head*
Martha Sutula — *Department Head*
Charles Wong — *Department Head*
Elizabeth Fassman-Beck — *Department Head*
Karen McLaughlin — *Principal Scientist*
Susanna Theroux — *Principal Scientist*
Scott Martindale — *Communications Director*
Christina Frieder — *Senior Scientist*
Faycal Kessouri — *Senior Scientist*
Katie Irving — *Scientist*
Jayme Smith — *Senior Scientist*
Joshua Steele — *Senior Scientist*

Kris Taniguchi-Quan — *Senior Scientist*

SCCWRP displayed an opening slide that 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.

The Commission Chair called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM. It was announced that Ryan Kempster is attending the meeting as a one-time replacement for Commissioner Vroom.

CONSENT AGENDA

- 1. Minutes of Meetings Held September 9, 2022**
- 2. Quarterly Financial Statement for the Period Ended September 30, 2022**
- 3. Quarterly Statement of Investments on September 30, 2022**
- 4. Minutes of CTAG Meetings Held November 3, 2022**
- 5. Resolution Authorizing a Remote Participation Meeting**

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

REGULAR AGENDA

6. Personnel and Finance Committee Report

Commissioner Tremblay reported that SCCWRP remains in strong financial health and has been successful attracting new staff following an update to SCCWRP's salary resolution in June 2023. Turnover has been averaging about 20% among technician-level staff – a reflection of the fact that many of these staff have decided to pursue graduate school. Tremblay said the Committee is impressed with the results of SCCWRP's annual audit, which was performed by a new financial auditor this year, and recommends Commission approval of a series of minor, auditor-recommended updates to SCCWRP policies and procedures. Executive Director Weisberg reported on gender and racial diversity among SCCWRP staff, including comparing SCCWRP's statistics to similar scientific organizations. Tremblay said the Committee has asked SCCWRP to share these initial findings with SCCWRP staff and also to examine other facets of DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) at SCCWRP.

Tremblay said the Committee discussed how the Commission will be required to resume holding in-person meetings beginning in March 2023, following expiration of the emergency resolution that allows for public meetings to be temporarily held remotely. She asked that the Commission consider whether they want to enable members of the public to participate remotely during future in-person Commission meetings. Commission Chair Purdy asked Commissioners if they had any objections to continuing to allow the public to

participate remotely in Commission meetings; Commissioners did not express any objections.

The Commission agreed to delay voting on remote broadcasting of future Commission meetings with public participation until later in the meeting, to combine this roll-call vote with other agenda items.

7. 2022 Financial Audit

Executive Director Weisberg presented the results of the agency's annual audit. He noted that despite switching to a new auditing firm – a standard practice every 4-5 years – SCCWRP's audit remained clean, with no deficiencies or matters of noncompliance for the 22nd year in a row.

Commissioners congratulated staff on positive outcomes of the financial audit. Commissioners agreed to delay voting to accept the audit until later in the meeting, to combine this roll-call vote with other agenda items.

8. Investment Policy

Executive Director Weisberg said SCCWRP's new auditing firm has recommended minor updates to multiple SCCWRP policies to ensure alignment with current best-practices guidance, including SCCWRP's investment policy (this agenda item) and SCCWRP's purchasing, capitalization and revenue recognition policies (Agenda Item 9).

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

9. Purchasing, Capitalization and Revenue Recognition Policy

Executive Director Weisberg said SCCWRP's new auditing firm has recommended increasing the agency's micro-purchase limit to \$10,000, the capitalization policy to \$25,000 and setting the revenue recognition policy to 120 days after year end.

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

10. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Weisberg welcomed CTAG Representative Ryan Kempster as a one-time alternate for Commissioner Vroom, who had a conflict and was unable to attend. Weisberg announced that three Commissioners would be retiring before the next Commission meeting in March 2023: (1) Renee Purdy, who will be relocating to the East Coast in January 2023, (2) David Barker, who is retiring at the end of 2022, and (3) James Herberg, who is retiring in February 2023. The three departing Commissioners expressed their appreciation and gratitude for their time on the SCCWRP Commission.

Weisberg said that SCCWRP has largely returned to pre-pandemic operations, hosting two recent in-person meetings that attracted more than 100 people: (1) a national scientific workshop focusing on advancing the science behind the DNA that organisms shed into

their environment, known as environmental DNA (eDNA); the workshop included welcome remarks by the White House's Office of Science and Technology Policy Deputy Director for Climate and Environment, and SCCWRP has been asked to brief the White House on the workshop's outcomes; and (2) the 2023 cycle of the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program held its planning kickoff meeting at SCCWRP; participants are now working to finalize study designs and study workplans in advance of the July 2023 initiation of field sampling. Weisberg also discussed SCCWRP's plans to hold additional large, in-person meetings in 2023, including: (1) a meeting of the science advisory board of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, scheduled for summer 2023; (2) a workshop focused on standardizing sampling procedures for measuring microplastics pollution scheduled for March; and (3) a workshop examining how to develop a framework to identify and prioritize remediating the many sources of microplastics entering the coastal ocean.

Weisberg reported that two types of errors have been discovered in some sediment quality analyses: (1) a minor calculation error in the Southern California Bight 2018 Regional Monitoring Program as a result of using an older data set, and (2) inconsistencies in results calculated by the member agencies using the same data, a consequence of program participants using different versions of the analytical methods. SCCWRP staff and CTAG are in the process of developing new QA protocols to prevent any future mistakes of this type. Commissioner Barker commented that as a result of these issues, the San Diego Regional Quality Control Board has held up using these data for regulatory purposes. Commission Chair Purdy recommended that this item be agendaized for discussion at a future Commission meeting.

Weisberg reported that SCCWRP has been building internal capacity to produce technical reports that are compliant with California's accessibility requirements for individuals with visual impairments, and that member agency staff may benefit from the types of resources, including staff training, that SCCWRP is developing. He encouraged member agencies to contact SCCWRP for support and questions.

Weisberg reminded the Commission that they had previously requested a presentation about an ongoing study examining quality assurance issues associated with the *Ceriodaphnia dubia* chronic reproduction toxicity test. He said that the lab analyses are nearing completion and that the item will be agendaized for their next meeting, with the delay allowing the Commission to get a more complete picture of the outcomes.

11. CTAG Report

CTAG Chair Emily Duncan reported that CTAG recently prioritized and ranked recommended next steps for SCCWRP's ongoing modeling work examining the influence of land-based nutrient discharges on coastal ocean health. CTAG has decided that SCCWRP will move forward with an updated assessment of the model's performance, known as a skill assessment, and also examine the effects of natural climate variability in influencing the eutrophication outcomes being predicted by the modeling work. CTAG also reviewed a proposal to fund an expert review panel that will independently evaluate the modeling work. CTAG decided to continue reviewing the panel proposal, asking SCCWRP staff to

prepare a written description of the review panel process before making a decision. Commissioner Barker said the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board is interested in learning what questions will be answered through the independent panel review process, and said he would be conferring with his colleagues at other Regional Boards regarding the proposed panel review process. He suggested that a description of the Review Panel process be agendaized for the next Commission meeting.

Duncan also provided a number of other updates: (1) Planning for the 2023 cycle of the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program is going exceptionally well, and will be one of the biggest Bight monitoring cycles to date; (2) CTAG is continuing to review the ongoing development of coastal ocean health report cards being developed for California and the West Coast; (3) CTAG is reviewing and providing feedback on the development of SCCWRP's new fact sheet series; and (4) CTAG is planning to resume in-person meetings with an intersessional planning meeting focusing on revisiting SCCWRP's Ecohydrology research theme scheduled for February 2023.

Duncan said that CTAG is recommending approval of the SCCWRP contract requiring Commission approval (Agenda Item 12).

12. 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. Executive Director Weisberg recommended approval of the following contract:

- 1) Ocean Protection Council (\$750,000)
State Water Resources Control Board (\$250,000)
Microplastic Sample Collection Method Standardization

Asked by Commissioners Tremblay and Herberg about whether the scope of work for the microplastics project has been developed, Weisberg said no. Weisberg explained that the contract will not be approved by the Ocean Protection Council until early 2023, and that in voting to approve the contract, the Commission is being asked to affirm that the work is appropriate for SCCWRP to take on, but that the Commission is not being asked to review and approve the study design itself. Weisberg said that SCCWRP will give a presentation to CTAG once the study design has been developed, at which time CTAG will be invited to review and help refine it. Weisberg said that given the Commission's interest in this project, SCCWRP can share more information with member agencies as it becomes available.

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

Weisberg presented the remaining eight 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) Watershed Conservation Authority (\$30,000)
Stream Temperature in Upper San Gabriel River
- 3) Coastal Quest (\$13,300)
Development of Post-fire Monitoring Recommendations
- 4) City of San Diego (through San Diego Regional Board SEP Fund) (\$54,000)
Bight Regional Monitoring Program
- 5) Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (\$22,981)
A California OAH Data Portal to Enable Synthesis and Understanding of State-wide Status and Trends
- 6) Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (\$4,520)
HAB Event Response: SoCal Domoic Acid
- 7) County of San Diego (through Weston) (\$119,300)
Turf Replacement BMP to Reduce Irrigation/Dry Weather Runoff
- 8) Los Angeles County Flood Control District (\$42,000)
Safe Clean Water Program (SCWP) Scientific Studies Proposal Review Coordination
- 9) State Water Resources Control Board (\$15,000)
Microplastics Sustainability Workshop

The Commission did not raise any objections to the contracts.

13. Bight '23 Planning Meeting

Principal Scientist McLaughlin opened this presentation by explaining that the upcoming 2023 cycle of the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program (Bight '23) will be bigger and better than ever. The fall 2023 kickoff meeting at SCCWRP attracted representatives from 90 organizations and was the biggest kickoff since the Bight program's inception in 1994. The Bight program is planning to conduct as many as seven studies: Sediment Quality, Harmful Algal Blooms, Trash, Microbiology, Estuaries, Submerged Aquatic Vegetation, and Water Quality (ocean acidification and hypoxia). The Bight program uses multiple indicators to assess condition of the coastal ocean, and is planning to incorporate multiple new indicators when field sampling kicks off in summer 2023, including examining fecal contamination in shellfish, toxins produced by freshwater algal blooms, and PFAS (Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances) contamination in sediment. The Bight program also is planning to incorporate multiple new monitoring tools and methods, including environmental DNA (eDNA), which will be done in partnership with CalCOFI (California Cooperative Fisheries Investigations) and NOAA's West Coast Ocean Acidification Survey. The Bight program also is planning to examine new habitats, including eelgrass beds and estuaries.

14. Report Card

Executive Director Weisberg began this presentation by explaining that an organization known as the West Coast Ocean Alliance – made up of the three West Coast states and tribes –has begun working to develop a report card assessing the health of multiple indicators of coastal ocean health. The ongoing development of the report card is serving as the starting point for the California Ocean Protection Council to develop a California-specific report card, ensuring comparability of the two report cards across multiple shared indicators. For each indicator, both report cards are planning to present an overall grade, temporal trend information, spatial pattern information, and a narrative interpretation of the trends, including linking the trends to likely cause(s) and the effectiveness of management actions to address problems. SCCWRP has a role in helping both organizations to develop their indicators, including examining which metrics to use to assess condition for each indicator, which data sets to use and how to collate them, which thresholds to use, and the uncertainty associated with the condition assessments. The OPC is planning to release a report in early 2023 offering trend information for an initial, partial set of indicators. Web dashboards will be built to synthesize and serve up information underlying each indicator assessment, and processes will be developed to facilitate annual updates for each report card. The final report cards are expected to be ready for public release in 2025.

Commissioner Lilley commented that the report cards will be effective in putting a spotlight on key indicators of coastal ocean health. Asked by Commissioner Tremblay if the report cards would consider efforts to maximize wastewater recycling in California to be a positive development, Weisberg said yes because enhanced wastewater recycling would support the State's goal of capturing more water. Asked by Commissioner Sharp if the report cards will assess inland water bodies, Weisberg said not initially. Asked by Commission Chair Purdy about how toxics will be assessed, Weisberg said that these conversations have not yet begun, and that the teams developing the report cards will need to balance the desire to be comprehensive (i.e., more detailed information) with the need to present results that a mayor or other elected community leader could understand. Asked by Commissioner Herberg if Heal the Bay will be involved in assessing coastal fecal contamination, Weisberg said Heal the Bay already is involved.

Asked by Commission Chair Purdy which indicators SCCWRP is working on, Weisberg said the list presently includes beach water quality, ocean acidification, marine mammals, kelp, and benthic infauna. Purdy said the Los Angeles Regional Board is most interested in learning more about ocean acidification, toxics and marine debris, and suggested that SCCWRP engage CTAG in in-depth discussions for several priority indicators. Weisberg said CTAG will be invited to prioritize which indicators they want to discuss with SCCWRP.

15. ROMS-BEC Nutrient Modeling

Department Head Sutula began the presentation by explaining that all models include some level of uncertainty in their predictions and quantifying that uncertainty is central to understanding how the model can be used for management decision-making. She indicated that SCCWRP is working closely with CTAG to quantify that uncertainty for the ongoing ROMS-BEC modeling work to assess how land-based nutrient discharges are influencing coastal water quality. One aspect of that was convening a workshop about 1-1/2 years ago

to explain how modeling uncertainty is quantified in other modeling efforts around the world. Recently, CTAG prioritized the next sets of activities they would like staff to undertake to quantify ROMS-BEC modeling uncertainty. She indicated that SCCWRP has developed workplans for implementing the three top-ranked options and proceeded to describe them: (1) Updated model validation, comparing model predictions against field measurements, (2) Quantifying how climate variability affects the model outputs, and (3) convening an expert scientific panel to independently review the modeling work.

Commissioner Barker questioned the need for the expert panel given that some of SCCWRP's modeling work already has been peer-reviewed as part of being published in scientific journals. Sutula responded that the journal peer-review process is a good first step, but additional sources of validation are valuable when using models for making large decisions. In addition, the Expert Panel provides for interactive conversations about how to improve management confidence in the model and can provide a roadmap for future SCCWRP research and model development activities. Barker further asked to elaborate on the panel's composition and charge, expressing concern that the Panel recommendations will only be as credible as the Panel members who are providing them. Sutula said SCCWRP is planning to engage its member agencies in developing the process for panel member selection and offered to provide greater detail about this at the next Commission meeting. Commissioner Mogus noted that this peer-review process will be separate and in addition to the State Water Board's own peer review process for the ROMS-BEC modeling work.

Audience member Amber Baylor, Director of Environmental Compliance for the South Orange County Wastewater Authority, provided public comment encouraging SCCWRP to move forward with the independent peer review process. She further offered to request field monitoring data from her agency if it would help with the validation process.

Commissioner Dojiri motioned to approve Consent Items 1-5, implementing remote broadcasting of future Commission meetings with public participation, Agenda Item 8 and Agenda Item 9 along with the contract requiring Commission approval, and Commissioner Benham seconded the motion. The Commission approved all the motioned items by roll call, with Commissioner Kempster abstaining on the motion, Commissioner Mogus abstaining on the contract, and Commissioner Blake abstaining on the contract along with Agenda Items 2 and 3.

16. Two Page Fact Sheets

Communications Director Martindale began this presentation by explaining that the Commission in June 2022 asked SCCWRP to resume production of a series of two-page educational fact sheets that are intended for Commissioners to be able to hand to board members of their agencies and similar audiences. One fact sheet is being produced per quarter. Because the fact sheets are a product requested by the Commission, CTAG is being asked to review and approve each one, then for the Commission to approve each one prior to its publication. The first two fact sheets to be produced are on using DNA technology to protect beachgoers from fecal contamination, and on modeling as a tool to support coastal water-quality decisions.

Commissioner Benham said the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health and Quality will complete a final review of the beach water-quality fact sheet in the coming weeks. Commissioners Herberg and Barker commended SCCWRP on the drafts of the two fact sheets produced to date, noting they are effective in achieving their purpose. Because CTAG is still completing its review of these fact sheets, Commissioners agreed to delay voting to approve both fact sheets until March 2023.

17. Other Business and Communications

None

18. Future Meeting Agenda Items

Executive Director Weisberg said items being considered for future meeting agendas include: (1) summarizing the work of expert review panel that was convened and facilitated by SCCWRP to update monitoring recommendations for contaminants of emerging concern (CECs) in aquatic ecosystems, and (2) a progress report on an ongoing SCCWRP initiative to determine how toxicity testing using the *Ceriodaphnia dubia* water flea can be improved to produce consistently high-quality, comparable results. Commission Chair Purdy suggested that CTAG agendaize a discussion about quality-control issues that affected reporting of sediment quality scores for the Southern California Bight 2018 Regional Monitoring Program; Purdy also suggested that CTAG decide whether to recommend that the Commission agendaize this issue for a future Commission meeting.

Weisberg said SCCWRP has begun planning for an all-day Commission retreat held about every seven years to discuss long-term, strategic directions for the organization, and that at an upcoming regular Commission meeting, the Commission will hear a preview of the topics planned for the retreat. Weisberg also said he will circulate a Doodle poll to select a date for the Commission retreat.

19. Public Comments

None

20. Adjournment

Commission Chair Renee Purdy adjourned the meeting at 11:59 AM until the next Commission meeting on March 3, 2023 at 9:00 AM.

Attest:

Bryan Nece
Secretary