

**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**

**March 1, 2024  
9:00 AM**

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**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Christina Yin — *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9*  
Karen Mogus — *State Water Resources Control Board*  
Kaitlyn Kalua — *California Ocean Protection Council*  
Jenny Newman (Chair) — *Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board*  
Jayne Joy — *Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board*  
Kelly Dorsey — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*  
Jim Marchese — *City of Los Angeles*  
Robert Ferrante — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*  
Rob Thompson — *Orange County Sanitation District*  
Peter Vroom — *City of San Diego*  
Arne Anselm — *Ventura County Watershed Protection District*  
Mark Lombos — *Los Angeles County Department of Public Works*  
Amanda Carr — *County of Orange*  
Justin Gamble — *County of San Diego*

**OTHER COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Lan Wiborg — *Orange County Sanitation District*

**STAFF PRESENT**

Stephen Weisberg — *Executive Director*  
Bryan Nece — *Administrative Officer*  
Wes Beverlin — *Legal Counsel*  
Ken Schiff — *Deputy Director*  
Elizabeth Fassman-Beck — *Department Head*  
John Griffith — *Department Head*  
Alvina Mehinto — *Department Head*  
Eric Stein — *Department Head*  
Martha Sutula — *Department Head*  
Charles Wong — *Department Head*  
Scott Martindale — *Communications Director*  
Susanna Theroux — *Principal Scientist*  
Karen McLaughlin — *Principal Scientist*  
Joshua Steele — *Senior Scientist*  
Leah Hampton Thorton — *Senior Scientist*  
Adriana Gonzalez-Fernandez — *Scientist*  
Danhui Xin — *Scientist*

Victoria McGruer — *Senior Research Technician*  
Emily Lau — *Communications Specialist*  
Ashlyn Leang — *Research Technician*  
Jayde Zimmerman — *Research Technician*

The meeting was broadcast on Zoom for audience members. Remote audience members were invited to address the Commission by making a request via the Zoom Q&A box.

Commission Chair Newman called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM.

Commissioner Dorsey requested to participate remotely via Zoom due to medical reasons. Commissioner Ferrante motioned to approve the request, and Commissioner Carr seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

- 1. Minutes of Meetings Held December 1, 2023**
- 2. Quarterly Financial Statement for the Period Ended December 31, 2023**
- 3. Quarterly Statement of Investments on December 31, 2023**
- 4. Minutes of CTAG Meetings Held February 1, 2024**

Commissioner Carr motioned to approve Consent Items 1-4, and Commissioner Thompson seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion unanimously with Commissioner Yin abstaining.

## **REGULAR AGENDA**

### **5. Personnel and Finance Committee Report**

Commissioner Thompson, Chair of the Personnel and Finance Committee, reported that SCCWRP's finances remain strong. Thompson said the Committee reviewed changes to SCCWRP's annual salary resolution ahead of the Commission's June 2024 meeting, including cost-of-living and other housekeeping adjustments. The Committee also discussed SCCWRP's susceptibility to an anticipated State budget shortfall and is working through possible contingency plans. Thompson said the Committee has completed the Executive Director's performance review, and said it has been a great year overall for both SCCWRP and the Commission.

Commissioners Yin and Kalua arrived at 9:10am. Commissioner Mogus arrived at 9:15am.

### **6. Commission-CTAG Strategic Planning Committee**

Executive Director Weisberg reminded the Commission that during their October 2023 strategic planning meeting, a joint committee was formed with CTAG to refine multiple aspects of how SCCWRP operates, including the process that the Commission and CTAG use to review and approve new contracts. Commissioner Ferrante, who is chair of the joint Commission-CTAG committee, reported that the committee met multiple times over the

past few months and had developed recommendations focused on refining SCCWRP's contract review process. Ferrante said the committee recommended four action items: (1) SCCWRP will expand the contract memo for projects that require Commission approval to clarify why SCCWRP is proposing to take on this work, (2) CTAG will review contracts through the lens of how well they align with SCCWRP's research themes, (3) CTAG will develop recommendations for which new contracts should be elevated to the Commission for discussion as a result of having potentially significant management implications, and (4) SCCWRP will provide presentations at Commission meetings about any new projects CTAG believes has important potential management implications. Ferrante said that although SCCWRP used the new format to prepare the contract memo this quarter, nothing has been set in stone and the committee invites the rest of the Commission to provide feedback on the committee's recommendations. He said the joint Commission-CTAG committee is planning to explore other changes to how SCCWRP operates, including refining the format of Commission meetings and how the Commission discusses the readiness of SCCWRP research for management applications. Commission Chair Newman suggested that the committee delay reconvening for a few quarters to give time for the Commission and CTAG to test-drive the new contract review process.

Commissioners thanked the committee for its effort to streamline the contract review process and expressed support for the new contract memo format. Asked by Commissioner Dorsey if the new process should be codified in writing, Ferrante agreed but suggested they do so after a few more meetings, letting the process evolve first. Ferrante suggested one addition to the new contract memo format: A notation indicating when CTAG did not review the contract due to the timing of when the contract was offered to SCCWRP.

## **7. Executive Director's Report**

Executive Director Weisberg welcomed Justin Gamble from the San Diego County Watershed Protection Program as a new Commissioner. He also identified that Juan Guerreiro from the City of San Diego Public Utilities Department and Adam Arika from the Los Angeles County Flood Control District were new Commissioners who would be attending future meetings. Gamble said he has worked with SCCWRP in a previous role and is excited to continue working with SCCWRP as a Commissioner. Weisberg also welcomed Commissioner Yin from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as this was her first in-person Commission meeting.

Weisberg introduced SCCWRP's two newest full-time staff members, who were both promoted from part-time student employees to full-time Research Technicians in the Microbiology Department: (1) Jayde Zimmerman, who recently completed her master's degree in biology from California State University, Long Beach and (2) Ashlyn Leang, who recently received her bachelor's degree in microbiology from California State University, Long Beach. Weisberg announced that SCCWRP had just published its 2023 Annual Report, and encouraged Commissioners to request extra copies to hand out to executive staff, governing boards and others.

Weisberg provided updates on three ongoing projects: (1) Weisberg said a multi-year investigation probing various potential sources of fecal contamination in the San Diego

River watershed will be wrapping up in June 2024 and the technical review committee for the study is scheduled to hold a public meeting April 17-18, 2024. (2) Weisberg said the 2023 cycle of the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program (Bight '23) is going well and turned to Principal Scientist McLaughlin for updates on the program. McLaughlin provided an overview of the progress of the seven study elements for Bight '23 and said sampling for the Sediment Quality study element was completed this summer, with sample analysis currently underway. She said the other study elements are on track and said sampling for the Water Quality/Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia element has been pushed to winter 2025 to coincide with a NOAA sampling effort. (3) Weisberg said the independent expert panel that is reviewing SCCWRP's ROMS-BEC ocean acidification and hypoxia modeling work is expected to report on its findings in the coming weeks. He invited Kevin Hardy from the National Water Research Institute (NWRI), which is facilitating the expert panel's deliberations, to provide an update. Hardy said the panel has completed its preliminary review and developed strong consensus; the timeline for when the panel will begin sharing its findings has not yet been announced.

## **8. CTAG Report**

CTAG Chair Ryan Kempster reported that he was elected Chair in February 2024, after serving as CTAG Vice Chair the previous year, and that Lauren Briggs from the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board was elected Vice Chair. David Laak, the previous CTAG Chair, rotated to Past Chair, and Past Chair Emily Duncan rotated off the CTAG Executive Committee. Kempster introduced Christina Sur as the new CTAG representative from the OPC and Katherine Walsh as the alternate CTAG representative from the California State Water Resources Control Board.

Although CTAG is not required to meet in person, Kempster said CTAG agrees that having in-person meetings with a remote participation option is preferable to entirely remote meetings. Due to State budget-imposed travel restrictions, CTAG members from the Water Boards have been granted approval to travel to SCCWRP for CTAG quarterly meetings only; case-by-case approval is required for other meetings, including the upcoming CTAG research planning intersessional on climate resiliency that is scheduled for April 11, 2024.

Kempster said CTAG reviewed two draft SCCWRP fact sheets on harmful algal blooms (HABs) and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The Commission requested at its December 2023 meeting to send the HABs fact sheet to the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) and the California Stormwater Quality Association (CASQA) for external review. Kempster said those minor edits have been incorporated and CTAG recommends the Commission approve the HABs fact sheet for publication.

Kempster requested that the Commission provide guidance to CTAG on two issues that have recently arisen: (1) CTAG is concerned about the Commission's December 2023 decision to begin inviting select external non-member agencies (i.e., CASA and CASQA) to review SCCWRP's draft fact sheets following CTAG review; CTAG is seeking Commission clarification on the rationale for inviting only these two organizations. (2) CTAG is considering whether to invite other organizations, such as CASA, to participate as a full

CTAG member. CTAG currently has the authority to add CTAG members, but is seeking Commission guidance before further considering such an option.

Commissioners discussed both issues and agreed that (1) SCCWRP should revert to the original review process for fact sheets which does not include external review; CTAG members, however, are encouraged to share draft products at their discretion with subject-matter experts internally and externally, including potentially with CASA and CASQA, and (2) CTAG should not add any non-member agencies as voting members of CTAG, although CTAG members are encouraged to continue to invite individuals from inside and outside their organization to attend CTAG meetings. The Commission accepted a public comment from Jared Voskuhl from CASA, who expressed CASA's appreciation for the Commission's thoughtful deliberations about expanding CTAG, and shared that CASA is satisfied with the Commission's decision.

Kempster said CTAG recommends the Commission hear presentations on the ongoing turf replacement study and SCCWRP's next steps for addressing recommendations from the ROMS-BEC independent review panel at its June 2024 meeting. Because of State budget-imposed travel restrictions, CTAG's next intersessional on climate resiliency was moved from January 2024 to April 11, 2024 and will be a hybrid meeting.

Kempster said CTAG recommends approval of the contract from the Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Coalition (Contract #1, Agenda Item 9) and noted that CTAG does not have a recommendation on the contract from OPC (Contract #2, Agenda Item 9) supporting ROMS-BEC modeling work in the San Francisco and Monterey Coasts, as SCCWRP was offered this contract after the February 2024 CTAG meeting.

## **9. Contract Review**

Executive Director Weisberg introduced this item by explaining that a joint Commission-CTAG committee was convened during the Commission's October 2023 strategic planning meeting and was tasked with developing recommendations to the Commission for how to refine the contract review process. Amongst other things, the committee developed and recommended a new structure for how SCCWRP briefs the Commission on new projects and upcoming contracts – a structure that includes how contracts fit into SCCWRP's strategic research directions and links to potential management actions.

Weisberg said the Commission will hear presentations using the new structure for three new contracts. Two of those are the large ones requiring Commission approval: (1) Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Coalition (SMC) technical services for 2024-2025, and (2) an OPC contract augmenting an ongoing effort to assess the effect of nutrient discharges on ocean acidification and hypoxia in the San Francisco and Monterey Coasts (aka Central Coast). The third is a biostimulatory technical support contract the Commission approved at their last meeting..

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 asked for approval of the following contracts.

- 1) County of Orange (\$78,121)  
County of Los Angeles (\$78,121)  
County of San Diego (\$78,121)  
County of Riverside (\$78,121)  
County of San Bernardino (\$78,121)  
County of Ventura (\$78,121)  
City of Los Angeles (\$67,533)  
City of San Diego (\$78,121)  
Caltrans (\$46,481)  
City of Long Beach (\$39,057)  
SMC 2024-2025 Technical Support

Deputy Director Schiff explained that this contract will fund the SMC's work during the next fiscal year, including the development of a new five-year SMC research agenda that will be created in consultation with an expert panel in fall 2024. SCCWRP is one of the SMC's 16 member agencies and will serve as the technical facilitator for the project. Schiff said previous SMC research agendas aligned well with SCCWRP's research directions.

Commissioner Anselm motioned to approve the SMC agreement, and Commissioner Gamble seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

- 2) Ocean Protection Council (\$561,072)  
Application of Integrated Earth System Model to Assess Anthropogenic Nutrient Impacts on OAH

Department Head Sutula introduced this contract by explaining that SCCWRP in 2020 received a contract from the OPC to develop a ROMS-BEC coastal water quality model to investigate the effects of nutrient discharges on ocean acidification and hypoxia conditions along the San Francisco and Monterey Coasts (Central Coast). The OPC is now offering a new contract that will augment the Central Coast modeling work.

Commissioners engaged in a lengthy discussion about the modeling work, with some Commissioners expressing concerns about SCCWRP accepting the new OPC contract. The Commissioners' concerns fell into three main themes: (1) SCCWRP should not take on additional ROMS-BEC modeling work until addressing concerns identified by the independent review panel noted in the Executive Director's report, (2) SCCWRP should focus on modeling work within Southern California and not the Central Coast, and (3) SCCWRP needs to do a good job of keeping Central Coast stakeholders informed about this work.

Regarding the first theme, some Commissioners pointed out that the independent review panel evaluating SCCWRP's ROMS-BEC coastal water-quality modeling in

Southern California has not yet completed its work or released any of its findings. Weisberg responded by stressing that SCCWRP is committed to using the panel's recommendations to improve the modeling work, both in Southern California and the Central Coast. Weisberg said that the augmented Central Coast modeling work is not slated to begin until fall 2024, by which point SCCWRP expects the panel to have released its findings and recommendations.

Some Commissioners questioned the need for SCCWRP to do modeling work in the Central Coast. Commissioner Thompson said he believes SCCWRP, the Commission and CTAG are all stretching their resources too thin by working on the Central Coast modeling work while the Southern California work is still ongoing. Weisberg responded by stating that the modeling work in Central Coast is intrinsically linked to the work done in Southern California, and that the value of working outside of Southern California is to test how well the model performs in different settings, such as during flooding from atmospheric rivers, which tends to be more intense along the Central Coast than in Southern California. Asked by Commissioner Marchese how the Central Coast model will be leveraged to support the Southern California model, Weisberg said there is only one unified set of ROMS-BEC modeling infrastructure, with all of the localized models being built on this shared infrastructure. Asked by Commissioner Gamble if stormwater discharges are being considered in the modeling work, Sutula said yes, but that stormwater discharges are not a major source of nutrients in Southern California coastal waters. Sutula said that, in contrast, stormwater discharges make up a larger share of nutrient inputs along the Central Coast, underscoring the value of applying ROMS-BEC modeling in different geographic settings. Commission Chair Newman commented that the Los Angeles Regional Board sees value in the Central Coast modeling work, as land uses are similar to Ventura County, which the L.A. Regional Board oversees.

The third theme that some Commissioners expressed concerns about is the adequacy of the modeling team's stakeholder interactions in the Central Coast. Jared Voskuhl from the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA), who was invited to address the Commission, stated that Central Coast stakeholders have expressed to him that they are not being briefed in a timely manner by the modeling team, and that not all of them had been made aware of the existence of the new OPC modeling contract being considered by the Commission. Weisberg responded that SCCWRP has a responsibility to involve them, but some of this is a timing issue since the contract was only offered to SCCWRP two weeks earlier.

When asked what would happen if SCCWRP did not accept the OPC contract, Weisberg said that the OPC would likely award the contract to the University of California, Los Angeles, which is another member of the ROMS-BEC modeling team – a decision that would likely hamper SCCWRP member agencies' ability to be involved in the Central Coast modeling work going forward.

Ferrante motioned to approve the contract and to simultaneously direct SCCWRP's Executive Director to report back to the Commission on SCCWRP's progress (1)

incorporating recommendations from the independent ROMS-BEC review panel into the Central Coast modeling work, and (2) doing outreach to San Francisco and Monterey Coast stakeholders. Commissioner Mogus seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion with Commissioner Kalua abstaining, and Commissioner Thompson voting no.

Weisberg said the new format for this agenda item has been successful in sparking the robust discussion between SCCWRP and the Commission about new projects that the Commission-CTAG committee intended.

Weisberg presented the remaining seven 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.

- 3) County of San Diego (through Weston Solutions) (\$102,000)  
Turf Replacement BMP Monitoring
- 4) City of Santa Barbara (\$78,000)  
Street Sweeping MP Neonic Tox
- 5) County of Orange (through Tetra Tech) (\$15,000)  
Sensor Installation for BMP Monitoring
- 6) EPA (through Montana State University) (\$86,376)  
Ecosystem Services
- 7) Southern California Caulerpa Action Team (\$50,000)  
Model Informed Reconnaissance to Eradicate Caulerpa from Newport Bay
- 8) City of Los Angeles (through Larry Walker Associates) (\$35,310)  
Stormwater Samples for Ballona Creek Study
- 9) City of Los Angeles (through Larry Walker Associates) (\$79,825)  
Los Angeles River Temperature Study

The Commission did not raise any concerns about these contracts. As the discussion was running long, the Commission agreed to postpone the biostimulatory technical support presentation, as they approved that contract at the last meeting and this was an informational item .

#### **10. PFAS Research Directions**

Weisberg introduced this item as one requested by the Commission on the present state of knowledge and future SCCWRP research directions for poly- and perfluoralkyl substances (PFAS), , rather than a specific project SCCWRP was presently conducting. Department Head Wong said PFAS have a wide range of industrial and consumer uses due to their



durability and resistance to heat, water, and oil. These properties also make PFAS an environmental concern as these “forever chemicals” are resistant to break down in the environment. In terms of current PFAS management actions, federal regulatory initiatives are focused on researching, restricting, and remediating PFAS contamination in drinking water. At the state level, California’s approach for monitoring PFAS has evolved to include drinking water and its sources, with opportunities to expand to other aquatic matrices in the future. Although there are considerable data about where PFAS occur in the environment, there is limited knowledge about the health effects associated with PFAS exposure.

The presentation transitioned to Department Head Mehinto, who described SCCWRP’s current research on PFAS. Mehinto explained that SCCWRP does not have a PFAS research emphasis as there are many other researchers working on this topic and no clear specialized niche for SCCWRP. Instead, SCCWRP is taking an opportunistic approach to PFAS research when requested by member agencies, such as incorporation of PFAS measurements into the Bight Regional Monitoring Program.

Commissioners agreed that SCCWRP’s opportunistic approach to PFAS research is appropriate since there are so many other researchers already working on this topic. Commissioner Ferrante commented that PFAS has become such an intractable contaminant to control because so little was done for so many years to curb their production and use.

#### **11. Newport Bay Shellfish**

Scientist Gonzalez-Fernandez began the presentation by explaining that while most Southern California waters consistently meet recreational bacterial water-quality standards during dry weather, most do not meet a second, more stringent bacterial standard for recreational shellfish harvesting, even during dry weather. The standard, known as SHEL, is designed to protect the health of people who consume shellfish. Newport Bay is the first water body in California to face a regulatory compliance deadline for the SHEL standard and all parties involved in the TMDL expressed concern that there is a poor scientific foundation for the SHEL standard. SCCWRP was asked to assess the standard, which it has done by examining the relationship between water column fecal coliforms, on which the SHEL standard is based, and presence of pathogens in nearby shellfish. The study’s first phase, which was conducted four years ago and examined this relationship during dry weather, found no correlation. The second phase of the study was conducted during wet weather and also found no relationship. SCCWRP is wrapping up data analyses and expects to report on the study’s findings in summer 2024. Gonzalez-Fernandez said a potential next step for Newport Bay stakeholders is to explore development of a site-specific objective.

Commissioners discussed how outcomes of the study can inform decision-making about Newport Bay’s bacterial total maximum daily load (TMDL). Commissioner Joy said that because the SHEL standard is not rooted on a solid scientific footing, the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Board is committed to using the study findings to inform an appropriate path forward. Commissioner Carr agreed and said the tools developed during the study can help create an improved management target.

## **12. Fact Sheets**

Communications Director Martindale explained that the Commission in 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 their board members, executive management and similar audiences. SCCWRP, which has been drafting one fact sheet per quarter, has published five fact sheets so far. Martindale said the Commission requested at its December 2023 meeting that CASA and CASQA begin reviewing SCCWRP's draft fact sheets following CTAG review. Martindale explained that both CASA and CASQA reviewed a draft of SCCWRP's fact sheet on harmful algal blooms over the past quarter and requested minor edits, which have already been incorporated into the fact sheet. He said that because the Commission earlier in the meeting reversed its decision on external review of fact sheets (Agenda Item 8), the next fact sheet on per- and polyfluorinated substances (PFAS) will not go to CASA and CASQA, but will go back to CTAG for final review; the PFAS fact sheet will then be brought back to the Commission for approval at the June 2024 meeting. He reminded the Commission that in 2023, they prioritized a list of topics for future fact sheets. Martindale said the next fact sheet will be on microplastics.

The Commission unanimously approved the HABs fact sheet for publication and agreed to revisit the PFAS fact sheet at its June 2024 meeting.

## **13. Other Business and Communications**

Commissioner Kalua said the OPC extended the deadline for public comment on the draft of the 2024 State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance report to March 8, 2024.

## **14. Future Meeting Agenda Items**

Executive Director Weisberg said the Commission will review and consider approving SCCWRP's annual research plan, annual budget, and annual salary resolution at its June 2024 meeting. He said CTAG has recommended agendaizing presentations on the ongoing turf replacement study and recommendations from the independent review panel that is evaluating the ROMS-BEC modeling work. Weisberg also suggested that the Commission hear presentations on the San Diego River Investigative Order study and the HF183 human health risk model study, which are both expected to be completed in summer 2024. Commissioners expressed support for hearing all of the presentations. Commissioner Carr said Orange County Public Works would be interested in discussing with the Commission whether HF183 should be used as a source tracking tool vs. to set regulatory targets.

## **15. Public Comments**

None

## **16. Adjournment**

Commission Chair Newman adjourned the meeting at 12:05 PM until the next Commission meeting on June 7, 2024 at 9:00 AM.

Attest:

Bryan Nece  
Secretary