

**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**

**December 6, 2024
9:00 AM**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Susana Arredondo — *Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Eric Lindberg — *Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Dave Gibson — *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*
Kris McFadden — *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*
Christine Tolchin — *County of San Diego*
Phillip Crader — *State Water Resources Control Board*
Jenn Eckerle — *California Ocean Protection Council*
Peter Kozelka — *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9*

OTHER COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Orelia DeBraal — *City of San Diego*
Jayne Joy — *Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Lan Wiborg — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Grant Sharp — *County of Orange*
Jenny Newman — *Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Martha Tremblay — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*

STAFF PRESENT

Stephen Weisberg — *Executive Director*
Wes Beverlin — *Legal Counsel*
Ken Schiff — *Deputy Director*
Elizabeth Fassman-Beck — *Department Head*
John Griffith — *Department Head*
Alvina Mehinto — *Department Head*
Charles Wong — *Department Head*
Eric Stein — *Department Head*
Martha Sutula — *Department Head*
Scott Martindale — *Communications Director*
Raphael Mazor — *Principal Scientist*
Susanna Theroux — *Principal Scientist*

Joshua Steele — *Senior Scientist*
Leah Thornton Hampton — *Senior Scientist*
Christina Frieder — *Senior Scientist*
Jan Walker — *Senior Scientist*
Edward Tiernan — *Engineer*
Danhui Xin — *Scientist*
Jill Tupitza — *Scientist*
Emily Lau — *Communications Specialist*

OTHERS PRESENT

Ryan Kempster — *City of San Diego*
Josh Westfall — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Shelly Walther — *Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts*
Chad Loflen — *San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board*
Sam Choi — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Danny Tang — *Orange County Sanitation District*
Jared Voskuhl — *California Association of Sanitation Agencies*
Megan Hall — *California Coastal Commission*
Sarah Mulder — *City of Ventura*

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 McFadden called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM and announced he would be replaced for part of the meeting by Commissioner DeBraal due to a conflicting meeting he had for part of the day.

CONSENT AGENDA

- 1. Minutes of Meetings Held September 6, 2024**
- 2. Quarterly Financial Statement for the Period Ended September 30, 2024**
- 3. Quarterly Statement of Investments on September 30, 2024**
- 4. Minutes of CTAG Meetings Held November 7, 2024**

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

REGULAR AGENDA

5. Personnel and Finance Committee Report

Commissioner Thompson, Chair of the Personnel and Finance Committee, reported that the Committee discussed SCCWRP's existing Joint Powers Agreement (JPA), which will expire in June 2026. Thompson said the Committee is discussing minor proposed revisions to the next JPA that are designed to enhance clarity and transparency over how SCCWRP

operates. Asked by Commissioner Crader to elaborate on the proposed changes, Thompson said the Committee is refining the language used to describe the three types of SCCWRP member agencies (wastewater, stormwater and regulatory), including updating descriptions of each sector's financial obligations, and clarifying each Commissioner's voting power and the role of the Commission vs. CTAG vs. SCCWRP's Executive Director in setting SCCWRP's research directions. Thompson said the Committee is planning to bring the draft JPA to the full Commission for review in March 2025.

Thompson reported that Wes Beverlin, who has served as SCCWRP's legal counsel for more than 13 years, is retiring after the Commission's March 2025 meeting. The Committee will recommend at the March 2025 Commission meeting that the agency vote to continue using the firm that represents Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts as SCCWRP's counsel, as it has for the duration of the agency's existence.

Thompson reported that SCCWRP remains in strong financial health. He said the Committee reviewed SCCWRP's annual financial audit, which is in good order, and recommended the Commission approve and file the audit (Agenda Item 6).

6. Financial Audit

Executive Director Weisberg introduced this item by congratulating SCCWRP's administrative staff on passing the organization's annual financial audit with no exceptions. Weisberg said the auditor complemented SCCWRP for being a well-run organization.

Commissioner Thompson motioned to receive the 2024 Financial Audit, and Commissioner Anselm seconded the motion. The Commission unanimously approved the motion.

7. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Weisberg welcomed Dr. Peter Kozelka from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9 as the newest Alternate Commissioner. Kozelka, who serves as Manager of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permits Office, replaced Christina Yin, who served on the Commission for five years. Kozelka, who has been with the EPA for more than 25 years, said he is excited to be on the Commission and work with SCCWRP.

Weisberg said he is pleased the Commission agreed in September 2024 to extend Commission meeting end times from 12:00PM until 2:00PM to provide time for extended discussion. He provided updates on two projects that he said the Commission has expressed interest in: First, Weisberg discussed SCCWRP's ROMS-BEC coastal ocean water quality modeling work. Weisberg said the independent expert panel that reviewed this body of science released its final report in November outlining its findings and recommendations. Weisberg said he would go into more detail about the panel's findings later in the meeting (Agenda Item 12). Second, Weisberg provided an update on a recently completed study investigating potential major sources of human fecal contamination in the San Diego River watershed during wet weather. He said the findings were discussed at San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board meeting on November 13, 2024. Commissioner Gibson said that the findings were significant and that SCCWRP's role was

pivotal. He indicated the November meeting was informational and expected that the San Diego Regional Board will discuss the study again at future meetings.

Weisberg reported that the Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Coalition (SMC) convened an expert panel in September 2024 to develop the SMC's next five-year research agenda. The Panel identified 20 high-priority stormwater research projects that the SMC should consider funding over the next five years. The SMC subsequently identified its four top-ranked projects, which the SMC is considering funding in the 2025-2026 fiscal year: 1) Building on a study in the San Diego region that measured exfiltration from underground sewer pipes, focusing on new methodologies and locations, 2) improving human health risk assessments from exposure to stormwater, 3) understanding the most effective management options that can be implemented to improve the biological health of urban streams, and 4) expanding on an existing SMC study that is quantifying the effectiveness of street sweeping for improving runoff water quality.

Weisberg said SCCWRP is playing a key role in developing an ocean health report card for the U.S. West Coast. Organized by the West Coast Ocean Alliance (WCOA), this project parallels a complementary ocean health report card being developed for the California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) by the California Ocean Science Trust. The WCOA report card, which will be aligned with the OPC report card, will report on the health of the coastal ocean across eight indicators, and will include a two-page, high-level informational summary document plus a website with additional data and resources. Two indicators – kelp forests and harmful algal blooms (HABs) – are expected to be completed by the end of the year; SCCWRP will present them at the next WCOA meeting in January 2025 in Washington. Weisberg said CTAG has recommended that the Commission hear a presentation on the ongoing development of the report cards at its next meeting. Asked by Commission Ferrante about the range of kelp forests in Southern California, Weisberg said kelp forests are in stronger ecological health in Southern California than in Northern California. Asked by Commissioner Marchese about the intended purpose of the report cards, Weisberg said the report cards are intended to help managers prioritize what aspects of ocean health most need attention and to examine local ocean health data within a West Coast-wide context.

Weisberg said the White House released its National Marine Carbon Dioxide Removal (mCDR) Research Strategy in November 2024. Although SCCWRP was not part of the writing team, SCCWRP is a partner on multiple exploratory mCDR investigations in Southern California.

Lastly, Weisberg reminded the Commission that during its September 2024 meeting, the Commission requested that CTAG develop a process for reviewing contracts that are offered to SCCWRP between CTAG and Commission meetings. CTAG has agreed to hold a virtual one-hour meeting one day before each quarterly Commission meeting to review all contracts offered to SCCWRP in the approximately one month between each CTAG and Commission meeting. SCCWRP will send CTAG a contract memo summarizing these contracts approximately one week prior to each CTAG contract review meeting.

8. CTAG Report

CTAG Chair Kempster reported that annual CTAG elections will be held in February 2025; Kempster will rotate to Past Chair, and CTAG will elect a Chair and Vice Chair.

CTAG met the day before the December 2024 Commission meeting to review three new contracts that were offered to SCCWRP after the November 2024 CTAG meeting. All three contracts are under \$250,000 and thus don't require Commission approval. CTAG also reviewed a change to the funding amount for Contract #1, which was recently reduced by State budget cuts. CTAG raised no concerns or objections to the contracts.

Kempster reported that CTAG agreed to form an OAH Committee to review technical activities SCCWRP takes on in response to recommendations from the expert science panel that independently reviewed the ROMS-BEC modeling work. Kempster said CTAG is in the process of deciding the roles and responsibilities of the Committee (Agenda Item 12).

Kempster provided an update on two projects that SCCWRP and CTAG are jointly pursuing: First, SCCWRP and CTAG have begun working on a study quantifying the cost of environmental monitoring across the region. The project committee met for the first time in October 2024 to identify key project objectives, and plans to meet monthly. Second, SCCWRP and CTAG have decided to delay working on a second study that will quantify mass emissions across the region; the second study will begin after the completion of the first study.

Kempster provided an update on the CTAG Committee formed to develop a scale/index for determining the scientific readiness of SCCWRP's work as it relates to policy and management decisions. He said the Committee agreed that scientific readiness is just one part of a bigger picture that also should consider management readiness, resource implications, and the date that CTAG last assessed the work. CTAG is in the process of developing a readiness scale that uses a numerical rating system to rate each indicator. Commission Chair McFadden said that he strongly supports moving in this direction. Kempster encouraged Commissioners to work with their CTAG representative to help shape the readiness scale.

Kempster said CTAG recommends the Commission hear presentations at future meetings on: 1) an update on the 2023 cycle of the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program (Bight '23), 2) a summary of CTAG's intersessional planning workshop in November 2024 to update SCCWRP's Microbial Water Quality research theme, 3) an update on the ongoing development of a West Coast ocean health report card, 4) a presentation on a new ROMS-BEC modeling data visualization initiative with NOAA (Contract #4 of Agenda Item 9), 5) a report-out from the CTAG Committee developing the readiness scale.

Kempster said there are no SCCWRP fact sheets to recommend for Commission approval at today's meeting, because CTAG and SCCWRP are still working on two draft fact sheets on HF183 and ocean acidification, respectively. He said these are the last two topics for fact sheets in the initial list of topics that the Commission helped draft in 2022, and that

SCCWRP and CTAG have put together a list of potential future topics for the Commission to review (Agenda Item 14).

Kempster said CTAG recommends approval of the two SCCWRP contracts requiring Commission approval (Contracts #1 and #2, Agenda Item 9).

9. Contract Review

Executive Director Weisberg reminded the Commission that SCCWRP recently redesigned the contract memo for projects that require Commission approval to more clearly communicate the management implications of SCCWRP taking on this work. He said SCCWRP would make a presentation about any new contracts that CTAG decides the Commission should hear.

CTAG held a contract review meeting one day prior to the Commission meeting and expressed no concerns or objections to the contracts offered to SCCWRP since the November 2024 CTAG meeting. Overall, CTAG determined that no projects warrant a Commission presentation this quarter.

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) State Water Resources Control Board (\$2,562,870)
SWAMP Special Studies

Task 5: Freshwater harmful algal bloom statewide monitoring strategy (\$425,000)

Task 11: Newport Bay shellfish pathogen study: Phase III-Phase IV (\$468,000)

Task 13: Laboratory methods training (\$425,000)

Tasks 14-15: Bioassessment tools for the San Diego Region (\$284,000)

Weisberg explained this contract is an omnibus of 14 independent contracts, with four of them requiring Commission approval. The rest of the contracts with values of \$250,000 or less are listed under Contract #3.

- 2) NOAA (through UC San Diego) (\$312,219)
Growing a Resilient and Equitable Southern California Coastal Ocean Observing System

Commissioner Thompson motioned to approve the two contracts, and Commissioner Tolchin seconded the motion. The Commission approved the motion with Commissioners Gibson and Crader abstaining.

Weisberg presented the remaining nine contracts, 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) State Water Resources Control Board
SWAMP Special Study Tasks that are under \$250K
- Task 1: Bioassessment program support services (\$177,898)
 - Task 2: Potential causes of degraded biological conditions (\$85,000)
 - Task 3: Feasibility of bird-based bioassessments (\$57,572)
 - Task 4: Protecting CA's healthy watersheds and high-quality waters (\$100,000)
 - Task 7: Harmful algal bloom mitigation in the Delta (\$200,000)
 - Task 9: Feasibility of achieving biologically relevant flow objectives (\$112,000)
 - Task 10: External QC to support implementation of a molecular algal index (\$60,000)
 - Task 16: Development of monitoring framework for inland water contact recreation (\$150,000)
 - Task 18: Eelgrass carbon and nitrogen content (\$18,000)

Asked by Commissioner Anselm about the bird-based bioassessment project (Task 3 of Contract #3), Principal Scientist Mazor said the project will consist of a literature review and community outreach to understand the feasibility of doing bird-based bioassessment. Mazor said there will be no data collection involved.

- 4) NOAA (through UC San Diego) (\$150,000)
Data Visualization for ROMS-BEC

Asked by Commissioner Ferrante to elaborate on Contract #4, Department Head Sutula said the contract would provide funding for staff to produce and share raw modeling data outputs from SCCWRP's existing ROMS-BEC coastal ocean water quality modeling work. The exact type of data visualizations that will be produced has yet to be determined. The expert panel that reviewed the ROMS-BEC modeling work recommended moving forward with this data visualization project to enhance access and transparency to the raw data that underlies this work.

- 5) County of San Diego (through NV5) (\$86,052)
Tijuana River Valley Pathogen Testing
- 6) California Association of Sanitation Agencies (\$46,000)
Microplastics Autosampling Methods
- 7) San Francisco Estuary Institute (\$175,000)
Wetland Action Plan
- 8) NOAA (\$28,145)
eDNA Analysis for Green Sea Turtles
- 9) Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts (\$97,100)
Santa Clara River Temperature Studies

- 10) Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts (\$66,000)
San Gabriel River Temperature Studies
- 11) Santa Clara Valley Water Agency (\$99,647)
Development of an Invasive Species Removal and River Rehabilitation Program for the Santa River

The Commission did not raise any concerns with these contracts.

Commissioner Thompson said the one-sentence descriptions in the contract memo for contracts that do not require Commission approval are not enough to provide CTAG with the information they need to comprehensively review the contracts. The Commission agreed, and directed staff to expand the contract descriptions going forward for all contracts over \$100,000, using the same one-page format as contracts requiring Commission approval.

Commissioner DeBraal replaced Commission Chair McFadden at 10:30 AM.

10. Statewide Estuary Monitoring Program

Senior Scientist Walker began the presentation by explaining that California managers do not have standardized assessment tools for evaluating the health of coastal wetlands statewide. Because there is no consistent framework or standardized methods for assessing the health of these sites, researchers and managers lack the ability to determine the relative success of different restoration projects across different sites in California. SCCWRP and its partners are building a coordinated coastal wetland monitoring program for Southern California's coastal wetlands. The regional monitoring program is built around five key elements: a comprehensive assessment framework, standardized methods, data management, sampling design, and an implementation strategy. These elements are designed to be leveraged across multiple existing estuary monitoring efforts, including the California Estuarine Marine Protected Area (EMPA) Monitoring Program, Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project Regional Monitoring Program, and Los Cerritos Wetlands Restoration. SCCWRP's next steps include developing an assessment dashboard and tools for coastal managers, creating an index that contextualizes a site to the broader region, and conducting training and outreach to the management community. Walker said that SCCWRP is also developing guidelines to help agencies implement the standardized assessment tools within their existing programs; a draft is expected to be available in Spring 2025.

Two guest speakers were invited to provide regulatory and regulated perspectives, respectively, on the benefits of developing coordinated regional estuary monitoring programs: Megan Hall, a Senior Environmental Scientist from the California Coastal Commission, and Sarah Mulder, Water Resources Manager for the City of Ventura.

Hall said having consistent monitoring protocols, a sentinel site network, and standardized regional data will be enormously beneficial to the California Coastal Commission, as a

coordinated, leveraged program has the potential to save monitoring costs and eliminate duplicated efforts. The Coastal Commission requires monitoring for coastal mitigation projects that it oversees; these monitoring efforts have historically been done on a project-specific basis. Hall said the Coastal Commission views the estuary monitoring tools that SCCWRP is developing as being ready for application at the pilot scale.

Mulder said the estuary monitoring program will be valuable in providing the City of Ventura with the opportunity to compare its estuary monitoring data with other sites across the region. She said she is excited to see that there are a lot of similarities and overlap in the design of coordinated statewide monitoring efforts and the City of Ventura's own nearly 15-year-old local monitoring program for the Santa Clara River Estuary. Mulder said the sentinel site network will ease the burden on regulated parties of identifying reference sites.

Commissioners expressed support for the development of a statewide wetland monitoring program. Commissioner Carr said she is encouraged to hear that regional monitoring tools will be integrated into local compliance monitoring of estuaries as required under stormwater discharge permits. Commissioner Crader said the regional monitoring program furthers the State Water Board's goals for wetland protection, and expressed support for this work from a regulatory standpoint. Commissioner Eckerle said the OPC has discussed how it can leverage and scale the regional monitoring program, and looks forward to the upcoming release of a guidance document that will assist managers in integrating the monitoring tools into their estuary monitoring programs.

Asked by Commissioner Arredondo about how researchers developed the indicators for the California EMPA Monitoring Program, Walker said a technical team looked at past permitting plans and developed indicators based on their utility to end users. Asked by Commissioner DeBaal about how researchers plan to continue building on this work, Walker said SCCWRP is still building out data dashboards and visualization tools to automate parts of the process, and is exploring how to integrate these estuary assessment tools into other projects, including ongoing efforts to enhance the climate resiliency of coastal habitats.

11. Artificial Intelligence

Executive Director Weisberg explained that artificial intelligence (AI) can potentially be a powerful scientific tool, but SCCWRP member agencies have expressed uncertainty around how and if they want to use AI. CTAG agreed that SCCWRP should pursue AI pilot projects, with the idea that if the projects are successful, SCCWRP can help train member agencies in use cases for AI. There are two major classes of AI: generative and visual AI. While generative AI learns patterns from training data to generate new material, vision AI uses patterns to automate and improve data interpretation and identification. Weisberg said vision AI projects seem more appropriate for SCCWRP. SCCWRP and CTAG discussed potential AI projects and identified two initial pilot projects to pursue: 1) using AI to review underwater video camera footage to identify fish observed in a water body, and 2) using AI to analyze satellite images of wetlands to assess their condition. SCCWRP and CTAG have decided to start with the fish identification study, which is anticipated to be the easier of

the two projects. SCCWRP will focus on training AI to identify a few species first, starting with sea stars, and then explore scaling the project for a community-wide assessment. Researchers will use underwater video imagery from the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts (LACSD) and Crystal Cove Conservancy for this pilot project. SCCWRP will share early results from the study with CTAG in May 2025.

The Commission expressed overall support for the AI projects, but directed SCCWRP and CTAG to weigh the potential environmental effects and ethical implications of using AI as they embark on these projects. Commissioner Arredondo said the data centers where AI information will be stored will have to be cooled, and expressed concern about potential water quality impacts. Commissioner Tolchin echoed that point and added that AI also can be energy-intensive, including the energy required to train AI. CTAG Chair Kempster said that while it's important to consider the potential environmental effects of AI, AI also has the potential to have positive impacts as a result of replacing trawl methods (which can be ecologically destructive) with video cameras. Commissioner DeBraal recommended conducting an independent ethics review of AI to ensure safeguards are in place around AI.

Asked by Commissioner Lindberg about the AI software and engine being used, Weisberg said SCCWRP is using AI software from multiple places. Commissioners Ferrante and Lombos shared that their agencies are investing in AI pilot projects and are establishing new policies around using AI to analyze and interpret data.

12. Modeling Three Year Plan

Executive Director Weisberg began the presentation by explaining that SCCWRP has been working on coastal ocean water-quality modeling for more than 15 years, including spending the past decade developing and validating the ROMS-BEC (Regional Ocean Modeling System-Biogeochemical Elemental Cycling) modeling tools. A few years ago, SCCWRP began using the modeling tools to run bookend scenarios to assess the potential effects land-based nutrient discharges into Southern California's coastal ocean are having on local ocean acidification. Some members of the stakeholder community expressed concerns about the readiness of the modeling tools to use as a management decision-making tool, so SCCWRP worked with the National Water Research Institute (NWRI) to convene an independent expert panel to review SCCWRP's modeling work. The expert panel released its final report outlining the panel's findings and recommendations in November 2024. Weisberg said the expert panel concluded that the modeling work to date is fundamentally sound, but provided 40 recommended next steps to invest in to refine the modeling work and build management confidence in the modeling predictions. Weisberg said SCCWRP agrees with all of the panel's findings and recommendations, which fall into five categories: soundness of the model, suggested expansions of the model, activities to further quantify model uncertainty, steps to enhance community acceptance, and additional model runs for providing context.

Weisberg outlined SCCWRP's proposed plan for addressing the NWRI expert panel's 40 recommendations, which researchers won't be able to get to all at once and thus need to be prioritized. SCCWRP's proposed plan involves working with three groups: the steering committee that oversaw the expert panel's formation, CTAG, and the original expert panel.

The steering committee, which is comprised of leaders from both the regulatory and regulated sectors, will serve as an advisory group to help the modeling team prioritize the panel's recommendations. The steering committee held its first meeting in November 2024 with the goal of providing recommendations by the end of April. CTAG would serve in a technical review capacity to ensure that work prioritized by the steering committee, as well as other modeling projects that SCCWRP takes on, will be done correctly. Toward that end, CTAG has formed a subcommittee that will hold full-day meetings every 2-3 months. Lastly, Weisberg said the expert panel, with support from NWRI and the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA), has agreed to reviewing this work holistically at periodic milestones. Weisberg said SCCWRP is developing a research plan that will define the budget, schedule, and communication plan for interacting with organizations outside of Southern California. The workplan is expected to be completed for CTAG review in May 2025; the Commission will have an opportunity to review this workplan in June 2025, when SCCWRP will present its annual Research Plan Executive Summary for Commission review and approval. Weisberg said SCCWRP wants to begin implementing the NWRI panel's recommendations immediately and asked for Commission feedback on the proposed plan.

Commissioners offered multiple suggestions for refinement, but ultimately expressed support for moving forward with SCCWRP's proposed plan. First, Commissioners engaged in a discussion about CTAG's role. Commissioner Lindberg expressed concerns about whether CTAG is the right group to review the modeling work. Commissioner Ferrante said while he supports using CTAG to oversee implementation of future modeling work, he expressed concerns that CTAG may not have adequate bandwidth to commit to this work, or the specific technical expertise needed. He asked if CTAG could invite external technical experts to sit on the subcommittee in place of CTAG members. Weisberg responded that one of the reasons CTAG formed a subcommittee was so they could have experts from within their organizations, as well as outside experts, participate. Commissioner Carr emphasized the importance of developing a communications plan that includes members of the broader community who are affected or may be critical of the modeling work. She said CASA can help ensure the information is reaching the appropriate audiences. Commissioner Ferrante emphasized the importance of making the CTAG subcommittee meetings open to the public. Commissioners concurred.

Second, Commissioners engaged in a discussion about working in an area that could potentially overlap with regulatory processes. Ferrante expressed concern that this work could inappropriately interfere with the development of regulations. Three Commissioners from the regulatory sector responded to this concern. Commissioners Lindberg and Gibson from the Santa Ana Regional Board and San Diego Regional Board, respectively, said they are still likely years away from using the modeling for any regulatory applications, and that they look forward to seeing the modeling tools continue to evolve. Gibson added that next steps should include examining the cost-benefit of proposed nutrient management solutions, as well as designing monitoring programs – perhaps through the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program – to complement the insights being produced through modeling. Commissioner Crader said that the State Water Board is aware of the potentially large investment burdens associated with possible regulatory

decisions that could be made based on the modeling work. He said the State is committed to making sure that any such investments have positive environmental outcomes.

Third, Commissioners engaged in a discussion about the costs associated with implementing all 40 of the panel's recommendations. Commissioners agreed that it will not be feasible to implement all of the recommendations simultaneously and that the advisory group will play a critical role in helping the modeling team prioritize which recommendations to work on first. Weisberg noted that it is SCCWRP staff's job to figure out how to pay for the work that SCCWRP member agencies prioritize.

Commissioner Thompson said that the Orange County Sanitation District is committed to being agile and innovative throughout this process, and expressed his appreciation that all parties intend to be deliberative and thoughtful about potential future nutrient management actions. Commissioner Ferrante added that his agency and others are fully supportive of improving the model with the best science, while simultaneously not jumping the gun on potential management actions.

Commission Chair McFadden returned at the end of Agenda Item 12, replacing Commissioner DeBral at the meeting.

13. Research Planning

Executive Director Weisberg began the presentation by explaining that CTAG plays a crucial role in helping SCCWRP develop and update its thematic research agenda, and collaborates with SCCWRP to develop full Thematic Research Plans, commonly known as 20-pagers, for each of its eight research themes. The research plans are summarized into an annual Research Plan Executive Summary, which the Commission reviews and approves in June of each year. About twice a year, CTAG hosts an intersessional research planning workshop to review and update one of SCCWRP's eight research themes – a process that includes reviewing SCCWRP's accomplishments in the area over the years since the last planning session and identifying candidate projects for the next 3-5 years. CTAG's most recent intersessional was held November 2024 to revisit SCCWRP's Microbial Water Quality research theme. In 2019, CTAG identified three research priorities for this theme: 1) Develop a risk-based threshold for HF183 to help managers prioritize contaminated sites, 2) assess the scientific foundation of the SHEL microbial standard for shellfish, and 3) develop methods to further differentiate between non-human and human fecal sources. Weisberg reported that SCCWRP accomplished all of these priorities. During the November 2024 intersessional, SCCWRP and CTAG jointly identified 44 projects that would be appropriate for SCCWRP to take on. Of those projects, 15 received votes from CTAG to prioritize. CTAG's top three projects, which were prioritized with strong cross-sector support, are: 1) transitioning molecular methods from using DNA to RNA, 2) developing sequencing as a source identification tool, and 3) expanding on SCCWRP's sewer exfiltration work. CTAG will hear a presentation on the outcomes of the intersessional meeting at its February 2025 meeting; the Commission at its June 2025 meeting will review the Research Plan Executive Summary, which will incorporate the outcomes of the Microbial Water Quality intersessional.

Asked by Commissioner DeBraal how the expanded sewer exfiltration work that CTAG has prioritized differs from a sewer exfiltration study prioritized by the SMC, Weisberg said that CTAG has prioritized a research direction, not a specific study. He also said that while the SMC's main interest is in expanding the sewer exfiltration work beyond the San Diego area, CTAG's main interest is in gathering more evidence that the prototype methods that SCCWRP developed to measure sewer exfiltration are effective. Asked by Commissioner Kozelka for clarity on the approval process for SCCWRP's research agenda, Weisberg said CTAG adopts an updated 20-pager for each of SCCWRP's thematic research themes on a rolling basis (typically 2-3 20-pagers per year), while the Commission approves the Research Plan Executive Summary once a year. Asked by Kozelka how Commissioners can influence the development of this research agenda, Weisberg said a particularly effective route is for Commissioners to interact with their CTAG representative; if the CTAG representative reports to their Commissioner that any part of the research planning process is not going well, the Commissioner should bring that up at the Commission meeting. Commissioners are also welcome to attend the CTAG research planning meetings. Asked by Commission Chair McFadden when is the optimal time for SCCWRP to give updates on a project, Weisberg said SCCWRP provides updates at multiple points in a project's lifecycle, but the Commission can request a presentation at any time about any project.

14. Fact Sheets

Communications Director Martindale explained that SCCWRP is producing 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. Since 2022, SCCWRP has published eight fact sheets based on an initial list of topics developed by the Commission. Martindale said SCCWRP is currently working with CTAG on two fact sheets (HF183 and ocean acidification); the two fact sheets are the last two topics in an initial list of fact sheet topics that the Commission prioritized a few years ago. Over the past quarter, SCCWRP and CTAG put together new list of six proposed fact sheet topics, which in order of priority are: environmental flows, wastewater-based disease surveillance, bioassays, coastal resiliency, eutrophication, and bioassessment.

Asked by Commissioner Crader to clarify how each fact sheet is framed and messaged, Martindale said SCCWRP works with CTAG to collaboratively develop each fact sheet – a process that typically spans 2-3 quarters. Commissioner Anselm noted that the fact sheets seem to fall into one of two categories: challenges managers face, and solutions being developed by the scientific community. Commissioner Thompson recommended that SCCWRP revisit and update older fact sheets in the future to ensure the information in them does not become outdated; Commissioners concurred.

Commissioners expressed support for moving forward with the proposed list of fact sheet topics. The Commission requested one change to the ordering of topics: Move the coastal resiliency topic from the #4 to #2 priority.

15. Other Business and Communications

None

16. Future Meeting Agenda Items

The Commission agreed to hear at its next meeting an update from the Personnel and Finance Committee on SCCWRP's next draft JPA, and an update from the CTAG subcommittee developing the scientific readiness scale. The Commission also will make a decision on who will serve as SCCWRP's legal counsel following the retirement of Wesley Beverlin. Executive Director Weisberg recommended that the Commission also hear a presentation on the ongoing development of the West Coast Ocean Alliance's ocean health report card.

Commissioner Carr suggested agendaizing a presentation on Bight '23 updates. Asked by Commissioner DeBraal about when the Commission will hear updates on the ROMS-BEC independent expert review, Weisberg suggested that the Commission should hear an update at its June 2025 meeting. Asked by Commissioner Thompson about whether SCCWRP should discuss potential future funding challenges in light of the upcoming change in the federal administration, Weisberg suggested that the Personnel and Finance Committee could discuss the matter in March 2025 and elevate any matters it thinks are worthy of a full Commission discussion in June 2025.

The Commission expressed support for the extended meeting format (9AM-2PM), and agreed to continue with the same format at future meetings.

17. Public Comments

None

18. Adjournment

Commission Chair McFadden adjourned the meeting at 1:47 PM until the next Commission meeting on March 7, 2025 at 9:00 AM.

Attest:

Bryan Nece
Secretary