

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD  
CENTRAL COAST REGION**

**STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF MAY 22-23, 2014**  
Prepared April 21, 2014

**ITEM NUMBER:** 13  
**SUBJECT:** Morro Bay Groundwater Degradation  
**STAFF CONTACT:** Harvey Packard 805/542-4770  
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**This Action:** Information/Discussion

**SUMMARY**

A resident of Morro Bay, Linda Stedjee, has requested that the Central Coast Water Board review staff's conclusions regarding the sources of nitrate in groundwater in the Morro Creek area near Morro Bay's well field. Staff concludes that the predominant source is upstream irrigated agriculture. Ms. Stedjee maintains that leaking sewers are the source of the nitrate.

**DISCUSSION**

**Background**

The City of Morro Bay maintains a well field adjacent to Morro Creek, just west of Highway 1. Historically, this well field is one of two that supply most drinking water to Morro Bay. In recent years, the city has used the wells in this area only when imported water from the State Water Project is not available. The wells draw groundwater from a shallow alluvial aquifer. The wells have contained concentrations of nitrate above the state's maximum contaminant level of 10 mg/L as nitrogen for several years.

In 2007 the City commissioned a report by Cleath and Associates, entitled *Morro Bay Nitrate Study*. The Cleath report concluded that agricultural fertilizer sources were the primary source of nitrate in the City's wells. In April 2008, Richard Sadowski and Marla Jo Bruton submitted information questioning the Cleath report's conclusions. Central Coast Water Board staff reviewed both the Cleath report and the information submitted by Mr. Sadowski and Ms. Bruton and concurred with the Cleath report. Attachment 1 is a letter describing staff's conclusions.

In 2013, Linda Stedjee submitted additional information and asked staff to reevaluate the situation. Attachment 2 is staff's letter dated September 25, 2013, in which staff again concludes that fertilizer is the main source of the nitrate degradation.

On November 1, 2013, Ms. Stedjee submitted a response to staff's letter; this is included as Attachment 3. In her letter, Ms. Stedjee asked the Central Coast Water Board to intervene in the disagreement between her and staff. Attachment 4 is a copy of some emails regarding Ms. Stedjee's request for a Board hearing.

**Technical Analysis**

Staff reviewed the November 1, 2013 submittal from Ms. Stedjee. Attachment 5 is a staff memo analyzing the information.

Staff, including registered geologists and engineers, has reviewed all the information submitted to the Central Coast Water Board on this topic. Staff concludes that there are multiple lines of evidence indicating that the primary source of nitrate in the City's wells is agricultural fertilizers.

**City of Morro Bay Actions**

On April 16, 2014, staff received information from the City regarding its actions. This information is Attachment 6. The City indicates that its capital improvement program includes elements to maintain and replace collection system infrastructure. Some work in the area will not be done until planning for the new wastewater treatment facility is completed.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Board take no action at this time and direct staff to not spend additional resources on this issue.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Central Coast Water Board letter dated July 1, 2008
2. Central Coast Water Board letter dated September 25, 2013
3. Information from Linda Stedjee, dated November 1, 2013
4. Email between Linda Stedjee and Central Coast Water Board staff
5. Memo from Dean Thomas to Harvey Packard, responding to November 1, 2013 submittal
6. City of Morro Bay information