

State of California
California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Colorado River Basin Region

MINUTES OF INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP

Saturday, February 20, 2016, 10:00 a.m. to 12:55 p.m.

California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Colorado River Basin Region
73-720 Fred Waring Drive
Palm Desert, CA 92253

Call to Order

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Colorado River Basin Region, was called to order by Chair Ellen Way at 10:00 a.m.

Regional Water Board Members Present:

Ellen Way, Nancy Wright, Buford Crites, Tom Davis, and Jayne Powell were present. (Ed Muzik and Hidali Garcia were absent).

Others Present

Abid Kahlaf
Joan Stormo
Roselyn Fleming
Jose Cortez
John Carmona
Sharon Carmona
Scott Stormo
Pam Scully
Scott Warren, Department of Toxic Substances Control
Anna Garcia, Mojave Water Agency
Holly Mayton, UC Riverside Student
Drew Story, UC Riverside Student
Emily Story
Jeanne Wahler
Mary Serra

Informational Workshop:

The Regional Water Board held the Public Workshop to discuss and provide direction to its staff on water quality policy priorities for the Colorado River Basin Region.

Jose L. Angel, Interim Executive Officer, provided the Board with an overview of the office water quality control programs, the office budget, the constraints attached to certain budget funds (e.g., budget allocation for the Department of Defense Program),

available budget fungibility, the Units in the office, the seven geographical planning areas in the region, what the main water quality issues in each area are, and the key projects that every regulatory Unit in the office is currently handling. He also briefly discussed the office performance for State Fiscal Year 2014-2015. Finally, he also provided the Board with a draft list of water quality priorities, and an example of criteria that the Board could use to establish priorities.

Ms. Way asked how much money the office gets from the state's general fund and how long it has been since the main source of funding for the office has been the Waste Discharge Permit Fund. Mr. Angel said that only about 0.9 Personnel Years [~\$140,000] come from the general fund, and that the trend to be a fee-based organization has been going on for the last 15 years or so.

Several Board members asked how the Board can balance establishing priorities that may not be reflected in the annual performance commitments or performance expectations from the State Water Board; and if good or bad regional performance translates into more or less funding for the region, respectively. Mr. Angel said that there are several ways by which the Board can provide direction regarding priorities, including during public workshops, during the Triennial Review of the Region's Basin Plan, before the calendar year starts, and before the state Fiscal Year starts. He added that through budget flexibility and fungibility staff should be able to accommodate most of the Board's water quality priorities that are not reflected in the performance commitments and expectations. If flexibility and fungibility are not enough, once the Board establishes priorities, he indicated the staff's job is to seek additional resources to address the Board's priorities. He added that he believes that in the near future performance will be driving funding decisions.

The Board discussed addressing cleanup of the New River, groundwater sustainability in the region, septic systems in the region, environmental justice issues in the eastern Coachella Valley, and the Salton Sea problems as important regional issues. The Board stated the staff must be pro-active to address the Salton Sea problems and to prevent certain areas with septic systems in the region becoming another problem like Yucca Valley. Regarding performance, Ms. Powell asked whether the State Water Resources Control Board uses the same standards to measure performance amongst the Regional Water Boards. Mr. Angel said it does, but each Region has its own performance targets. The Board indicated that it also wants the staff to lead regarding statewide performance.

Public Comments

Ms. Scully, a member of the public, stated that she attended the workshop to learn about groundwater sustainability and was concerned about people wasting water when they irrigate and about groundwater over-pumping. She also said she supported the Board being pro-active regarding Salton Sea.

Ms. Fleming, a Board staff person, said that disadvantaged communities and people are overburdened with excessive regulations. She added that there are opportunities to revitalize the communities by turning polluted sites into parks, for example. Regarding the Salton Sea, she said that she is also looking at revitalizing the area by cleaning up

the waste, by making money out of the waste/contamination and putting the money back into the community.

Mr. Stormo, a member of the public, supported the notion of the Regional Water Board being more pro-active regarding the Salton Sea. He also expressed concerns about water overuse in the desert area, particularly using water for irrigation of lawns.

Mr. Story, a member of the public, commented that he and other UC Riverside students created a website (SaltonSeaSense.com) to educate people on the Salton Sea and to support community engagement/education as a high priority to ensure funding for management of the Sea continues to be appropriated. He also supported the Regional Water Board being pro-active about the Sea.

Mr. Phil Rosentrater, on behalf of the Salton Sea Authority, submitted a letter dated February 17, 2016, with comments for the Workshop. The letter states that the Salton Sea Authority (SSA) is keenly interested in partnering with the Regional Board in areas where joint planning and sharing of resources (including water bond grant funding sources) can deliver multiple benefits to address the Sea's problems.

Regional Water Board Direction to Interim Executive Officer

The Board directed the Interim Executive Officer to address the following issues as a matter of priority this year:

1. Legal mandates—staff should ensure the Regional Water Board timely meets its legal mandates (e.g., Triennial Review).
2. Salton Sea—staff should be pro-active and part of the discussions regarding the Sea's restoration process so that the Regional Water Board can help shape and implement water quality policy for and facilitate restoration efforts.
3. New River Pollution—staff should continue to address New River pollution from Mexico, but also should emphasize pollutant load reduction in the Imperial Valley to more directly benefit the Salton Sea.
4. Coachella Valley Salt and Nutrient Management Plan (SNMP)—staff should continue to work with stakeholders to ensure the SNMP is completed for groundwater protection and sustainability in the Coachella Valley.
5. Water Quality Threat from Septic Systems—staff should actively address the threat that septic systems in certain areas in the region pose to water quality, including high-density septic systems in Twentynine Palms, Joshua Tree, Cathedral City, La Quinta, Bermuda Dunes, the I-10 corridor between Palm Springs and Desert Hot Springs, and the eastern Coachella Valley; and should develop and use a common set of California Environmental Quality Act responses to ensure agencies proposing to approve additional development that would be serviced with septic system are aware of and address the Board's concerns.

The Workshop adjourned at approximately 12:55 p.m.