

**STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD
BOARD MEETING SESSION – EXECUTIVE OFFICE
NOVEMBER 16, 2021**

ITEM 5

SUBJECT

CONSIDERATION OF A PROPOSED RESOLUTION CONDEMNING RACISM, XENOPHOBIA, BIGOTRY, AND RACIAL INJUSTICE AND STRENGTHENING COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, ACCESS, AND ANTI-RACISM.

DISCUSSION

In California, race is a predictor of access to, and the quality of, the governmental services a person receives, including access to safe, clean water for drinking and affordable services to support sanitation as well as wastewater collection, treatment, and reuse. In fact, race is the strongest predictor of water and sanitation access. California Environmental Protection Agency's 2021 Pollution and Prejudice StoryMap and CalEnviroScreen data analyses demonstrate that historically redlined neighborhoods are "generally associated with worse environmental conditions and greater population vulnerability to the effects of pollution today." In addition, Black, Indigenous, and people of color are overrepresented in the neighborhoods that are the most environmentally degraded. None of the State Water Resources Control Board's (State Water Board) or nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards' (Regional Water Boards, collectively Water Boards) policies, programs, or plans specifically consider or address racial inequities. However, data demonstrate the need for the Water Boards to take actions aligned with its mission to equitably serve the people of the state.

Additionally, there is a need to competently integrate racial equity into the Water Boards' work. As a government agency with a role in ensuring access to clean, safe, and affordable water for all Californians, the State Water Board recognizes the need to acknowledge racial inequity, create an inclusive culture where people of all identities feel they belong and can contribute, and proactively work to eliminate systemic racism and its effects within the Water Boards and its workforce, and through our work with stakeholders and communities.

Although the Water Boards, along with the California Environmental Protection Agency and other governmental organizations, have been involved in racial equity work with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity since 2018, it is clear that the Water Boards need to do more. During an August 18, 2020 board meeting, Water Boards staff presented a framework for addressing racial equity. The State Water Board acknowledged the historic effects of institutional racism that must be confronted by government and directed staff to develop a priority plan of action. The Executive Director of the State Water Board established a Racial Equity Steering Committee and

Racial Equity Working group (collectively Racial Equity Team) comprised of a diverse cross section of State and Regional Water Board staff to advance this work. To date, the Racial Equity Team has hosted and documented public listening sessions in both English and Spanish; organized employee listening sessions with contracted Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion experts; conducted research; and developed a draft proposed resolution Condemning Racism, Xenophobia, and Racial Injustice and Strengthening Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Access, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (Racial Equity Resolution) to release for public comment and propose for State Water Board adoption.

The State Water Board released the proposed Racial Equity Resolution for public comment on Tuesday, June 22, 2021. On July 7, 2021, the State Water Board hosted a workshop to inform the public and stakeholders about the Water Boards' Racial Equity work and listen to feedback on the proposed Racial Equity Resolution. Stakeholders requested additional time to review and comment on the Racial Equity Resolution, and the State Water Board extended the public comment period from July 12, 2021 to August 2, 2021. Water Boards employees also provided comments on the resolution. Staff conducted additional communications outreach via email, social media, and stakeholder calls to inform the public about the deadline extension. The State Water Board considered the written and verbal comments from the public and Water Boards employees and revised the proposed Racial Equity Resolution.

The proposed Racial Equity Resolution acknowledges:

- The existence of systemic racism across American institutions,
- American history and the colonization, slavery, displacement, and murder of Indigenous people contributing to racist precedents,
- Race as a predictor of access to clean, safe, and affordable water and sanitation, and healthy watersheds,
- Disproportionate distribution of adverse environmental impacts based on race, and
- Disproportionate allocations of funding and services based on race.

The goals of the proposed Racial Equity Resolution are to:

- Condemn racism, xenophobia, white supremacy, bigotry, racial injustice, and race-based violence and hate
- Eliminate inequitable distribution of resources and services based on race
- Strengthen the Water Boards' commitment to
 - o Equity across all Water Boards programs and services,
 - o Uphold an anti-racist workplace and develop policies that will lead to a racially equitable and diverse workforce,
 - o Evaluate and remediate Water Boards systems, practices, policies, and cultures that created and continue to perpetuate racial inequities and environmental injustices,
 - o Identify and implement actions to dismantle and remediate inequities within the organization and throughout its work,

- o Provide equitable access to: safe, clean, affordable drinking water and other beneficial uses of water; affordable services to support sanitation, wastewater collection, treatment, and reuse; and healthy watersheds.

The proposed Racial Equity Resolution articulates the State Water Board's commitment to advancing racial equity within its workforce, programs, and services. If the proposed Racial Equity Resolution is adopted, State Water Board staff would (1) create a proposal to establish an Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to achieve a workplace, workforce, and work outcomes that reflect racial equity; (2) work with stakeholders to develop and implement a data-driven Racial Equity Action Plan that considers public and employee feedback (e.g., gathered via the 2020 employee survey, the public and employee listening sessions, the July 7, 2021 public workshop, written comments, and other forms of public and employee engagement) and includes accountability metrics to transparently track progress toward the directives in the proposed Racial Equity Resolution; and (3) encourage each of the Regional Water Quality Control Boards to create complementary racial equity resolutions and action plans.

POLICY ISSUE

Should the State Water Board adopt the proposed Racial Equity Resolution to specifically consider and address racial inequities in its work?

FISCAL IMPACT

No additional fiscal impact to currently budgeted program resources. If adopted, the Racial Equity Resolution would require that the State Water Board requests additional resources to build capacity for achieving its racial equity goals and directives and to deepen racial equity knowledge and expertise within the Water Boards.

REGIONAL BOARD IMPACT

If the State Water Board adopts the proposed Racial Equity Resolution, there is minimal direct impact to the Regional Water Boards. The proposed Racial Equity Resolution encourages the nine Regional Water Boards to adopt this resolution, or a similar resolution that condemns racism, xenophobia, and racial injustice; affirms a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism; directs development of a racial equity action plan; and otherwise prioritizes this important work.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend the State Water Board adopt the proposed Racial Equity Resolution.