

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

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF April 21-22, 2022

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ITEM NUMBER: 3

SUBJECT: Environmental Justice Update – Progress Towards a Racial Equity Resolution for the Central Coast Region

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KEY INFORMATION: This item presents an update on the Central Coast Water Board's efforts to advance racial equity.

ACTION: Information/Discussion

SUMMARY

This staff report is the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's (Central Coast Water Board's) annual Environmental Justice Update, which focuses on the organization's efforts to advance racial equity. A primary objective of this agenda item is for the Central Coast Water Board to acknowledge and discuss the effects of institutional racism that have systematically impacted Black, Indigenous, and people of color, that must be addressed by government agencies. Additionally, to provide transparency and opportunity for early public input, this staff report also provides an update on staff's progress towards preparing a preliminary draft Racial Equity Resolution (Attachment 1). The Central Coast Water Board intends to publicly notice a draft Racial Equity Resolution in the future to solicit written comments and will consider adoption of a proposed Racial Equity Resolution during a subsequently scheduled and separately noticed Central Coast Water Board meeting. While the focus of this agenda item is the Central Coast Water Board's efforts to advance racial equity, Attachment 2 provides a brief update on key environmental justice projects, include the Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program, Central Coast Regional Bottled Water Program, and the Central Coast Region Integrated Regional Water Management Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement (DACTI) Grant.

As the Central Coast Water Board's Environmental Justice Liaison to the Board, Board Member Hunter has played a critical role to support the Central Coast Water Board's long history of commitment to environmental justice issues. As part of this agenda item, the Central Coast Water Board is also pleased to invite the following guest speakers to share their experiences and perspectives on opportunities and challenges to advance environmental justice and racial equity in the Central Coast Region:

Guest Speakers:

- Bidtah N. Becker, CalEPA Deputy Secretary for Environmental Justice, Tribal Affairs and Border Relations
- David N. Pellow, Dehlsen Professor and Chair of the Environmental Studies Program, UC Santa Barbara
- Ana Rosa Rizo-Centino, Executive Committee Member, Central Coast Climate Justice Network

This summary and Attachment 1 – Preliminary Draft Racial Equity Resolution are also available in Spanish. Interested persons may also request that the entire staff report be translated into Spanish, dependent upon available resources.

DISCUSSION

Across the nation, including in California, there has been sustained public outcry to condemn devastating police violence against African Americans, rising hate crimes against the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, degrading anti-immigrant rhetoric against the Latinx community, and the longstanding racial inequities that have systematically impacted people of color.

The mission of California state government is to serve all Californians. Yet, in California, race and ethnicity are the strongest predictors of access to safe, clean water for drinking and affordable services to support sanitation including wastewater collection, treatment, and reuse. Regrettably, Black, Indigenous, and people of color are overrepresented in the neighborhoods that are the most environmentally degraded. Furthermore, data indicates that underrepresented communities¹ are also likely to bear the greatest burdens of climate change impacts. To serve all Californians, state agencies must advance racial equity by providing a focus on the needs and priorities of communities of color, especially those that have been marginalized and oppressed.

As a government agency with a role in protecting water quality for all Californians, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and Regional Water Quality Control Boards (collectively, Water Boards) recognize the need to acknowledge racial inequity, create an inclusive culture where people of all identities feel they belong and

¹ Underrepresented Communities include but are not limited to Disadvantaged Communities (DACs), Severely Disadvantaged Communities (SDACs), Economically Distressed Areas (EDAs), Tribes, Environmentally Disadvantaged Communities (EnvDACs), and members of Fringe Communities.

can contribute, and proactively work to eliminate systemic racism and racial inequities within the Water Boards' policies, programs, and plans.

In December 2021, Central Coast Water Board staff provided a detailed [update on the Water Boards' racial equity initiative actions](#),² including the State Water Board's adoption of [Resolution No. 2021-0050 Condemning Racism, Xenophobia, Bigotry, and Racial Injustice and Strengthening Commitment to Racial Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Access, and Anti-Racism](#)³.

Background

In 2019, the total population of the Central Coast Region was estimated to be 1.6 million people⁴. The region includes primarily urbanized, agricultural, and natural landscape areas, with agriculture and related food and wine processing activities as the major industries in the region, as well as oil production, tourism, and manufacturing. United States Census Bureau data collected via the 2019 American Community Survey⁵ (ACS) show that 44% of Central Coast Region's population is white, yet the Central Coast Water Board's workforce census data from 2022 show that 93% of the Central Coast Water Board's workforce and 92% of the Central Coast Water Boards' management is white.⁶ Similarly, the 2019 ACS data show that 45% of region's population is Hispanic, compared to only 7% of the Central Coast Water Board's workforce and 0% of the Central Coast Water Board's management. The 2019 ACS data also show that 6% of the region's population is Asian and 2% is Black, and the Central Coast Water Board's workforce is 9% Asian and 2% Black. This data indicates that the Central Coast Water Board's workforce does not reflect the racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse communities that we serve, especially Hispanic or Latinx communities. Our employees understand that a diverse workforce increases our collective knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to effectively engage stakeholders and protect water quality for all communities in the Central Coast Region. Therefore, consistent with the State Water Board's "Immediate Hiring Practices Action Plan for Advancing Workforce Diversity at the Water Boards," hiring managers and supervisors are taking specific short-term actions to improve workforce diversity while a more holistic plan is being developed by the Water Boards.

California Native American Tribes have a rich history in coastal California for more than 10,000 years. Villages were located near fresh water and seasonal food sources, and tribes would often move to different sites throughout the year. Cultural teachings and significant knowledge about flora, fauna, and natural cycles of life along the coast was passed down over many generations. Despite a long tradition of stewardship of the land

² https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2021/dec/item9_stfrpt

³ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/resolutions/2021/rs2021-0050.pdf

⁴ United Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), <https://www.census.gov/>

⁵ ACS data for the Central Coast Region includes Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara counties, as well as southern Santa Clara County.

⁶ At the time of the 2022 Central Coast Water Board's Workforce Census Survey, approximately 78 staff were employed and 53 staff participated in the anonymous survey (April 8, 2022). The workforce percentages reflect those who participated in the survey.

and its natural and cultural resources, the Central Coast Water Board recognizes that California Native American Tribes were brutally disrupted by the establishment of the Spanish Missions in the late 18th century, followed by Mexican ranchos, and as California became a state in 1850. This was devastating to California Native American Tribes and the landscapes they nurtured. Consistent with the State Water Board's Tribal Consultation Policy, the Central Coast Water Board recognizes the challenging history of Indigenous people in California, and we are committed to engaging in meaningful involvement and consultation with California Native American Tribes by recognizing each tribe's unique sovereign status, culture, history, knowledge and experience, and environmental and water concerns.

The history and demographics of agricultural areas in the Central Coast Region are strongly influenced by the Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican immigrants who work in the fields harvesting fruits and vegetables and work in food processing facilities. While these farmworkers are essential to the economic engine of the Central Coast Region's agricultural industry, the Central Coast Water Board acknowledges that they often face unsafe and unhealthy living and working conditions, especially related to poor air quality, poor water quality and exposure to pesticides and other chemicals. Additionally, farmworker communities often face significant challenges to achieve racial equity and inclusion in the communities where they live and work. Current data included in the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment's (OEHHA's) CalEnviroScreen⁷ mapping tool identifies communities that are disproportionately impacted by a combination of environmental stressors and socioeconomic disadvantages and confirms that contaminated drinking water sources disproportionately burden low income and Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities throughout California, further exacerbating persistent inequities. The Central Coast Water Board's human right to water resolution, affirms our commitment to upholding California's human right to water law and demonstrates that every human being in California—including Black, Indigenous, and people of color—deserves safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitation purposes.

The contribution of Asian Americans to the agricultural growth of the Central Coast Region is well documented. In addition, Asian Americans played important historical roles on the Central Coast as miners, railroad workers, marina and pier builders, and laundry, market, and hotel workers. The Central Coast Water Board recognizes that many Asian Americans also faced institutionalized discrimination. In 1942, the United States Government carried out one of the largest controlled migrations in history, requiring the removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from areas of coastal California, Oregon, and Washington, resulting in the relocation and imprisonment of approximately 113,000 people.⁸ From Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties, approximately 2,500 persons of Japanese ancestry were forced to relocate to

⁷ CalEnviroScreen is a screening tool used to help identify communities disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution and with population characteristics that make them more sensitive to pollution, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/11d2f52282a54ceebcac7428e6184203/page/Draft-CalEnviroScreen-4.0/>

⁸ Burton, M. Farrell, F. Lord, and R. Lord, *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation*, 2000.

internment camps, and many families lost their homes or were forced to sell their property for a fraction of the real value.⁹ Later, many families returned to the Central Coast to restart their livelihoods and continue farming and other industries.

Advancing Racial Equity at the Central Coast Water Board

Racial Equity Working Group

In August 2021, to better understand and address the challenges described above, Central Coast Water Board staff convened a regional Racial Equity Working Group to increase employee engagement and lead the Central Coast Water Boards' efforts to institutionalize racial equity. The working group is made up of thirteen employees, including Kathy Truong (Chair), Katie McNeill (Vice-Chair), James Bishop, Kimberly Chandler, Julia Dyer, Lauren Gordon, Kathleen Hicks, Rachel Hohn, Genevieve Safi, Angela Schroeter, Jacqueline Tkac, Sarah Treadwell, and Arwen Wyatt-Mair. The Central Coast Water Board does not receive dedicated resources to address priority initiatives such as racial equity, environmental justice, underrepresented communities, or climate change, therefore the staff contributing to these initiatives take on these tasks alongside their existing programmatic duties. The Racial Equity Working Group is entirely staff led and all members have completed racial equity training. The primary goals of the working group are to conduct internal and external engagement to identify and prioritize opportunities to integrate racial equity into Central Coast Water Board programs and practices, and to draft a region-specific Racial Equity Resolution to present to the Board and public in 2022.

Internal Engagement

As an initial step, the Racial Equity Working Group presented at the Central Coast Water Board's general staff meetings in 2021 and 2022 to convey the Water Boards' priority to advance racial equity and to introduce racial equity terms and concepts. As part of this discussion, all employees of the Central Coast Water Board were invited to participate in a brief anonymous racial equity survey. The purpose of the survey was to assess employees' readiness to participate in racial equity dialogue to inform future action steps toward advancing racial equity within the organization. As a next step, the Racial Equity Working Group members led ten program specific meetings to have detailed discussions about the opportunities and challenges to advance racial equity within the organization and the water quality programs we implement. The goal was to create a "brave space" that would allow and encourage employees to fully share and participate. The survey, General Staff Meeting presentations, and program specific discussions maximized the opportunity for all employees to provide meaningful input regarding racial equity at the Central Coast Water Board.

During internal engagement, employees brought up a variety of topics, ranging from workforce recruitment, to how they feel about racial equity within the Water Boards, and

⁹ <https://www.centralcoastasianhistory.org/japanese-american-history>

their ideas about how to address relationships with external stakeholders. In some cases, employees felt that the Central Coast Water Board is doing very well in promoting an inclusive climate. In other cases, employees described feeling isolated and the relative lack of diversity among staff and the desire to recruit and retain more people of color. Another recurring theme in the discussions was identifying ways to improve the accessibility of the Water Boards' water quality programs to underrepresented communities, for example more effective language translation services for both dischargers and communities affected by water quality issues. In general, employees indicated the desire and willingness to continue to dialogue to advance racial equity. And nearly all employees expressed the need for continued training to improve their understanding of racial equity. A more detailed discussion follows below about what employees feel is going well and where the Central Coast Water Board can improve with regards to racial equity.

What is going well?

The following themes cover employee perspectives on what is going well with regard to racial equity and inclusion at the Water Boards.

- Employees stated that they have positive feelings about inclusion and openness within the Central Coast Water Board. Employees describe that the organization provides a safe space that encourages staff to be comfortable sharing personal experiences. They especially appreciate the opportunity to share and celebrate diversity and culture among our staff.
- Employees appreciate that Board Members and management prioritize environmental justice and racial equity and provide support and encouragement for employees to attend racial equity training.
- Employees appreciate that the Central Coast Water Board has a region-specific staff-level Racial Equity Working Group to address issues and consider solutions that may be unique to the Central Coast Region.
- Employees appreciate that the Water Boards has improved and consistently prioritizes grant funding for underrepresented communities.
- Employees appreciate that the organization is trying to normalize talking about race and racial equity and see that as a sign of progress.

What could be improved?

The themes below reflect employee perspectives and experiences at the Central Coast Water Board that are challenging, difficult, or were expressed as areas that should be addressed or improved upon, in connection with racial equity.

- There is a significant lack of diversity at the Central Coast Water Board, and the organization is not representative of the communities that we serve. The lack of diversity may also feel isolating and less inclusive to some employees, and some employees question the sincerity of statements that lack of diversity is a problem to be addressed. Many employees recommended improving recruitment and retention efforts to increase diversity in the workplace. A few employees offered a contrasting perspective that racial equity should not be addressed as a work priority, due to time constraints and other competing workload.

- Some employees emphasized that Latinx and Asian and Pacific Islander communities are an important part of the history of the Central Coast Region, and they are not recognized adequately in the State Water Board's racial equity resolution.
- Employees raised the issue of inequity related to drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and emphasized that outreach to underrepresented communities must be improved.
- Employees indicated that prioritization efforts in water quality programs should intentionally prioritize protecting all beneficial uses that support underrepresented communities (e.g., creeks should be swimmable and fishable in all parts of the region). Employees commented that key performance metrics and databases should include racial equity and environmental justice indicators to inform prioritization (e.g., GeoTracker¹⁰, GAMA Groundwater Information System¹¹, Integrated Report¹²).
- Employees indicated that technical assistance, adequate resources and funding, and long-term capacity building is needed to improve racial equity in our water quality programs.
- Improved language accessibility and translation services was commonly identified as a critical need. Employees describe that the communities who most need our services are the least able to access the Water Boards – due to lack of capacity, difficulty to participate in public meetings due to time and location constraints, language barriers, or lack of information or technical expertise.
- Employees requested better access to regional demographic data, translation services, and training to improve and expand public outreach.
- Employees requested additional region-specific support and resources to engage more effectively with California Native American Tribes.
- Employees also commented that the Water Boards must dedicate resources (staff, time, and funding) to sustain efforts to effectively advance racial equity.

External Engagement and Public Participation Process

The Central Coast Water Board is also committed to engaging the public to solicit their perspectives and receive input on priorities for addressing racial inequities as they relate to the Central Coast Water Board and the programs we implement. The Racial Equity Working Group has developed an external engagement strategy to be conducted in three phases:

- 1) Phase 1 - Early Outreach: The purpose of this phase is to contact environmental justice partners and reach out to interested parties on the environmental justice email subscription list to let them know about the Central Coast Water Board's Racial Equity Initiative and its plans to draft a Racial Equity Resolution. This phase will also include early outreach to California Native American Tribes using the formal engagement methods described in the State Water Board's Tribal Consultation Policy. The desired outcome for this phase is to share a preliminary draft Racial

¹⁰ <https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/>

¹¹ <https://gamagroundwater.waterboards.ca.gov/gama/gamamap/public/>

¹² https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/water_quality_assessment/integrated_report.html

Equity Resolution and to let the public know about the upcoming opportunities to provide input. Timeframe – February 2022 to April 2022.

- 2) Phase 2 - Focused Outreach: This phase includes focused discussions with interested persons to receive input to inform the development of the Racial Equity Resolution. The scope and methods used will be dependent on the response received from Phase 1. For example, a larger group may necessitate the use of webinar style public listening sessions, in addition to in-person meetings with individuals or groups. Timeframe – April 2022 to May 2022.
- 3) Phase 3 - Formal Outreach: This phase includes the formal public participation process to provide notice that the Draft Racial Equity Resolution is available for review and that the public may submit written comments during a 30-day public comment period. Central Coast Water Board staff will compile written comments received and prepare a revised Draft Racial Equity Resolution for the Board to consider at an upcoming public meeting, during which members of the public will also have the opportunity to address the Board. Timeframe – May 2022 to June 2022.

During Phase 1 of early outreach, environmental justice partners encouraged the Central Coast Water Board to ensure sufficient time and opportunity for the public to provide meaningful input on the Racial Equity Resolution. Additionally, interested persons also indicated that the Racial Equity Resolution and associated action plans should address both the regulated community (e.g., dischargers), as well as the communities affected by discharges – since both are affected by racial inequities. The Central Coast Water Board will compile feedback from all phases of the external engagement process to develop the Racial Equity Resolution and associated future action plans. Additionally, environmental justice partners indicated that the Central Coast Water Board could greatly improve in making Board decision making process more accessible to the public by evaluating the time and place for public meetings, as well as making it easier and less costly for community members to provide input (e.g., allowing recorded video or audio comments to be submitted in advance). Environmental justice partners also suggested that more resources could be dedicated to language accessibility to enable the translation of more outreach materials, in a timely manner.

Preliminary Draft Racial Equity Resolution for the Central Coast Region

A primary goal of the Central Coast Water Board's Racial Equity Working Group is to prepare a preliminary draft Racial Equity Resolution that builds upon the State Water Board's Racial Equity Resolution, and that is informed by internal and external input regarding issues specific to the Central Coast Region. Of particular importance is that the Central Coast Water Board's preliminary draft Racial Equity Resolution acknowledges the existence of systemic racism and racial inequity across American institutions and condemns racism, xenophobia, white supremacy, racial injustice, and race-based violence and hate. Additionally, and equally important, the preliminary draft Racial Equity Resolution demonstrates the Central Coast Water Board's commitment to supporting an anti-racist workplace and developing policies that will lead to a racially

equitable and diverse workforce; and to promote racial equity in the Water Boards' systems, practices, policies, and programs to protect water quality for all Californians. The Central Coast Water Board's preliminary draft Racial Equity Resolution is included in Attachment 1.

Human Right to Water

California Water Code section 106.3, subdivision (a) states that it is the policy of the State of California "that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitation purposes." On January 26, 2017, the Central Coast Water Board adopted Resolution No. R3-2017-0004, which affirms the realization of the human right to water and the protection of human health as the Central Coast Water Board's top priorities. The Central Coast Water Board's Racial Equity Initiative and preliminary draft Racial Equity Resolution recognizes that people from Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities are disproportionately affected by lack of safe, clean, and affordable drinking water, and reaffirms our commitment to prioritize and uphold California's human right to water for every human being in California.

Environmental Justice

The Central Coast Water Board's Racial Equity Initiative is in alignment with the Central Coast Water Board's historical actions focused on environmental justice and engaging with underrepresented communities. Environmental Justice principles call for the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income in the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of all environmental laws, regulations, and policies that affect every community's natural resources and the places people live, work, play, and learn. The Central Coast Water Board implements regulatory activities and water quality projects in a manner that ensures the fair treatment of all people, including underrepresented communities. Underrepresented communities include but are not limited to Disadvantaged Communities (DACs), Severely Disadvantaged Communities (SDACs), Economically Distressed Areas (EDAs), Tribes, Environmentally Disadvantaged Communities (EnvDACs), and members of Fringe Communities.¹³

¹³ Disadvantaged Community: a community with an annual median household income that is less than 80% of the statewide annual median household income (Public Resources Code section 80002(e)); Severely Disadvantaged Community: a community with a median household income of less than 60% of the statewide average. (Public Resources Code section 80002(n)); Economically Distressed Area: a municipality with a population of 20,000 persons or less, a rural county, or a reasonably isolated and divisible segment of a larger municipality where the segment of the population is 20,000 persons or less with an annual median household income that is less than 85% of the statewide median household income and with one or more of the following conditions as determined by the department: (1) financial hardship, (2) unemployment rate at least 2% higher than the statewide average, or (3) low population density. (Water Code section 79702(k)); Tribes: federally recognized Indian Tribes and California State Indian Tribes listed on the Native American Heritage Commission's California Tribal Consultation List; EnvDACs: CalEPA designates the top 25 percent scoring census tracts as DACs. Census tracts that score the highest five percent of pollution burden scores but do not have an overall CalEnviroScreen score because of unreliable socioeconomic or health data are also designated as DACs (refer to the CalEnviroScreen 3.0 Mapping Tool or Results Excel Sheet); Fringe Community: communities that do not meet the established DAC, SDAC, and EDA

The Central Coast Water Board has a long history of prioritizing environmental justice activities to focus on building environmental justice capacity in underrepresented communities, conducting free drinking water well testing for domestic wells and small water systems, and providing emergency bottled water and drinking water treatment for systems impacted by pollution. Staff has provided the Board with annual updates on environmental justice activities since 2013. While the focus of this agenda item is racial equity, current updates on the progress of the following environmental justice projects are included in Attachment 2: Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program, Central Coast Regional Bottled Water Program, and the Central Coast Region Integrated Regional Water Management Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement (DACTI) Grant.

Climate Change

The Central Coast Region faces the threat and the effects of climate change for the foreseeable and distant future. As discussed at the January 2019 Board Meeting, the Central Coast Water Board recognizes that the effects of climate change and associated extreme hydrologic conditions and sea level rise has a disproportionate negative impact on Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities¹⁴. To proactively prepare and respond, the Central Coast Water Board has launched the Central Coast Water Board's Climate Action Initiative, which includes the prioritization of activities to benefit underrepresented communities. The Climate Action Initiative is consistent with the Governor's Executive Order B-30-15 and the [State Water Board's Climate Change Resolution No. 2017-0012](#).¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Central Coast Water Board staff are committed to furthering environmental justice and racial equity as part of our ongoing activities to implement our water quality mission in coordination with our statewide Water Board counterparts, environmental justice partners, and the community members and regulated entities we serve. The development of the Racial Equity Resolution is an important step towards demonstrating this commitment. Staff will continue the planned external engagement activities to implement a robust public process to develop a Central Coast specific Racial Equity Resolution. Moving forward, the Central Coast Water Board will implement a stepwise iterative and transparent approach in response to both challenges and opportunities until racial equity is effectively integrated as part of our water quality mission and organizational culture.

definitions but can show that they score in the top 25 percent of either the Pollution Burden or Population Characteristics score using the CalEnviroScreen 3.0.

¹⁴ Presentation by Maricela Morales, CAUSE, to the Central Coast Water Board on January 31, 2019, https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2019/01_january/Presentations/item9_pres_7.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/resolutions/2017/rs2017_0012.pdf

ATTACHMENTS

1. Preliminary Draft Racial Equity Resolution for the Central Coast Region
2. Environmental Justice Project Updates