



# Media Release

## State Water Board Adopts 2019 Ocean Plan Review that Ranks Important Water Quality Issues

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**SACRAMENTO** – In an ongoing effort to protect California beaches and coastal waters, the State Water Resources Control Board today adopted a report that prioritizes nearly two dozen topics for future projects and rule-making actions, from assessing health risks from harmful bacteria to understanding the impacts of ocean acidification.

The report resulted from a review of the [Water Quality Control Plan for Ocean Waters of California \(Ocean Plan\)](#), the statewide plan that governs the protection of the state's coastal waters by controlling the discharge of waste into the ocean. Discharges can include stormwater runoff, municipally treated sewage outflow and industrial flows regulated by regional and State Board permits.

“The health of California’s coastal waters and beaches are critical to the state’s population and economy,” said E. Joaquin Esquivel, Chair of the State Water Resources Control Board. “Climate change, ongoing pollution challenges, sea level rise, ocean acidification and other threats require our regulatory programs to adapt, learn, and utilize new technologies and science to protect and preserve our coast. Adoption of this review plan transparently sets out the scope and scale of possible future amendments to the Ocean Plan and areas of continued work by the State Board.”

Besides the potential health risks that poor water quality poses, beach closures harm the state economy. Millions of tourists and residents visit California’s beaches annually to swim, kayak, dive or surf, generating more than \$10 billion per year. The beaches in southern San Diego County are particularly impacted because of the chronic sewage spills originating in Tijuana.

The review was conducted by State Water Board staff in coordination with the coastal water boards and with input gathered from four public meetings held earlier this year. Using this input, staff prepared the draft report and related work plan that lists and ranks 22 issues as potential future projects.

The five highest-ranked issues in the adopted review are:

- **Tribal Beneficial Uses:** Some of the state’s Native American tribes use marine resources for sustenance and cultural ceremonies. Exploring potential definitions



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

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and designations of these uses would allow the State Water Board to protect and enhance these resources.

- **Bacteria Objectives for Water Contact Recreation:** Continued study of bacterial water quality objectives would allow the State Water Board to utilize the most current science in assessing risks to the public from exposure to harmful pathogens while swimming or engaging in other water-contact ocean activities.
- **Areas of Special Biological Significance (ASBS):** The Ocean Plan authorizes the State Water Board to make exceptions to a prohibition against the discharge of waste into Areas of Special Biological Significance, provided special conditions are met that protect natural water quality in these areas. In 2012, exceptions were granted to 27 dischargers who had difficulty implementing the special protections during the 2011-15 drought. This topic would allow the Board to consider clarifying revisions or additional requirements.
- **Desalination Implementation Provisions:** Stakeholders and interested parties have requested clarification about Ocean Plan provisions that protect ocean waters against impacts associated with the construction and operation of seawater desalination facilities. This issue would review existing permitting requirements and consider options for streamlining the process.
- **Ocean Acidification, Hypoxia, and Climate Change Impacts:** Climate change is driving shifts in the chemical properties of ocean waters. To better understand the impacts, the State Water Board would evaluate how to develop water quality objectives and improve the resilience of the coastal environment.

In recent years, the Water Boards, which have more than 200 scientists, engineers and geologists working to protect California's coastal waters, have made significant progress, including the adoption of trash, desalination and bacteria amendments to the Ocean Plan.

The Water Boards also safeguard ocean water quality with programs and policies on ocean water use for power plant cooling, permitting of waste discharges, limitations on discharges of waste into areas of special biological significance, monitoring to notify beach users if beaches are safe for swimming and addressing polluted beaches.

To learn more, please visit the [State Water Board Ocean Plan](#) website or the [fact sheet](#) on the Ocean Plan.

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