

**REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN DIEGO REGION**

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT

AUGUST 27, 2025

ITEM 1

SUBJECT

Public hearing to consider Tentative Cease and Desist Order to United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission, South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant, Discharge to the Pacific Ocean Through the South Bay Ocean Outfall (Tentative Cease and Desist Order No. R9-2025-0139).

(Melissa Corona).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Adopt Tentative Cease and Desist Order No. R9-2025-0139.

KEY ISSUE

The United States section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has announced a planned accelerated incremental expansion of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) from 25 million gallons per day (MGD) to 35 MGD, with a target start date of August 28, 2025. Influent to the SBIWTP is primarily comprised of domestic and industrial wastewater from the City of Tijuana's municipal collection system and dry weather flows captured by five canyon collectors in the Tijuana River Valley. USIBWC discharges secondary-treated wastewater from the SBIWTP to the Pacific Ocean via the South Bay Land Outfall (SBLO) and South Bay Ocean Outfall (SBOO).

Under its planned accelerated incremental expansion, USIBWC plans to treat up to 35 MGD of influent wastewater through advanced primary treatment followed by 25 MGD of secondary treatment using existing activated sludge processes. USIBWC plans to blend the bypassed 10 MGD advanced primary effluent with the 25 MGD secondary effluent prior to discharge to the Pacific Ocean via the SBLO and SBOO.

USIBWC's discharge from the SBIWTP is regulated by Order No. R9-2021-0001, as amended, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit No. CA0108928, Waste Discharge Requirements for the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant Discharge to the Pacific Ocean Through the South Bay Ocean Outfall (NPDES Permit). The NPDES Permit establishes waste discharge requirements for the

discharge of secondary-treated wastewater from the SBIWTP, including a maximum permitted effluent flow limitation of 25 MGD.

USIBWC's target date to treat up to 10 MGD of increased flow by August 28, 2025, does not provide sufficient time for the San Diego Water Board to amend USIBWC's NPDES Permit. However, the San Diego Water Board will consider amending the NPDES Permit prior to its expiration date (June 30, 2026) to account for the expansion from 25 MGD to 35 MGD.

USIBWC's planned expansion from 25 MGD to 35 MGD and inability to treat more than 25 MGD to secondary treatment standards, requiring a partial bypass of secondary treatment, will violate or threatens to violate the NPDES Permit and other requirements of the San Diego Water Board for the facility. The San Diego Water Board will consider issuance of Tentative Cease and Desist Order No. R9-2025-0139 to require compliance with NPDES Permit final effluent limitations, except for certain parameters with established interim effluent limitations. The Tentative Cease and Desist Order will also establish remedial and preventative actions USIBWC must implement, and require submittal of documents related to the design, operation and maintenance under the planned conditions.

PRACTICAL VISION

Addressing water quality impairments from transboundary flows is one of the San Diego Water Board's highest priorities according to its Key Beneficial Uses and Key Areas approach, adopted in Chapter 1 of its Practical Vision. The lower Tijuana River, Tijuana River Estuary, and the Region's near shore coastal waters fall under the highest-ranking priority for water bodies with beneficial uses associated with recreation, habitat and ecosystems, and fish and shellfish consumption.

Chapter 4 of the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision cites pollution in the Tijuana River Valley and surrounding beaches as a significant environmental justice issue for the Region. Transboundary pollution in the San Diego – Tijuana region disproportionately impacts disadvantaged and underserved communities on both sides of the border.

Accordingly, the treatment of an additional 10 MGD of wastewater from Tijuana's municipal collection system, and the corresponding reduction in dry-weather transboundary flows, is consistent with the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision.

DISCUSSION

Limitations within Tijuana's collection and conveyance system result in discharges of wastewater to the concrete-lined main channel of the Tijuana River in Mexico. This frequently results in polluted transboundary flows through the main channel of the

Tijuana River that reach the Tijuana River Valley, Tijuana River Estuary, and the Pacific Ocean shoreline adjacent to the river mouth.

Transboundary flows of untreated domestic and industrial wastewater originating in Tijuana result in significant and prolonged water quality impairments in the lower Tijuana River, Tijuana River Estuary, and San Diego's near-shore coastal waters. Poor water quality conditions stemming from transboundary flows result in significant beach closures in southern San Diego County and degraded air quality, particularly in the communities of Imperial Beach, Nestor, and San Ysidro, with disadvantaged communities bearing the brunt of the pollution. Accordingly, controlling transboundary flows from Mexico and improving border water quality is one of the San Diego Water Board's highest priorities.

The removal and treatment of an additional 10 MGD from the City of Tijuana's municipal wastewater collection system will allow authorities in Mexico to capture additional dry weather flows from the main channel of the Tijuana River, reducing transboundary flows into the United States.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The San Diego Water Board included this item in its notice and agenda for the August 27, 2025 meeting.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- Tentative Cease and Desist Order No. R9-2025-0139
- July 16, 2025 Letter from USIBWC to San Diego Water Board
- Written Comments on Tentative Cease and Desist Order No. R9-2025-0139¹

¹ Written comments received by the deadline of 12:00PM (noon) on August 21, 2025 are included.