

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

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT  
September 10, 2025**

**ITEM 6**

**SUBJECT**

Sea Level Rise: Updated Ocean Protection Council Guidance and New National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Model. (*Jimmy Smith*)

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Informational item only; no recommendation.

**KEY ISSUE**

This item provides an overview of the Ocean Protection Council's (OPC) updated sea level rise guidance and highlights of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) new predictive sea level rise model.

**PRACTICAL VISION**

Chapter 1 of the 2021 Practical Vision: Strategize for Healthy Waters, is about focusing on important water bodies and uses. The San Diego Region stretches along 85 miles of coastline punctuated by estuaries and river mouths providing key recreational and ecosystem beneficial uses. Rising sea levels threaten these key areas. Chapter 8 of the Practical Vision, Provide Effective Community Engagement and Communication is focused on implementing the core values of leadership, communication, and transparency. This item provides an excellent opportunity for the Board and the public to learn about the latest statewide guidance related to sea level rise and advances in predictive models.

**DISCUSSION**

The OPC is a California Natural Resources Agency founded by the California Ocean Protection Act. Their mission is to protect California's coast and ocean by advancing innovative, science-based policy and management, making strategic investments, and catalyzing action through partnerships and collaboration. This presentation will provide an overview of the State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance: 2024 Science and Policy Update, adopted by the OPC in June 2024. The updated Guidance represents California's most current synthesis of sea level rise science and adaptation policy and was developed in collaboration with an interdisciplinary Science Task Force coordinated by the Ocean Science Trust. The presentation will describe how the task force contributed to updated projections and the integration of new approaches, including the shift from probabilistic to scenario-based modeling to better align with national guidance and support risk-based decision-making.

The talk will also outline the Guidance's stepwise policy framework for incorporating sea level rise into planning and infrastructure projects, including considerations for storm events, vertical land motion, and long-term adaptation pathways. The updated Guidance is designed to help state, regional, and local agencies, including water managers,

integrate the best available science into their projects and develop resilient, forward-looking strategies for coastal and low-lying areas affected by sea level rise.

Ella McDougall is the Climate Change Program Manager at the OPC, where she leads the Council's work on sea level rise adaptation and coastal resilience. Since joining OPC in 2021, Ella has overseen initiatives including the development of the 2024 State Sea Level Rise Guidance, the California Beach Resiliency Plan, and the implementation of the SB 1 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Planning Grant Program and Tribal Cultural Resources Funding Program. Prior to OPC, she completed a California Sea Grant Fellowship with the State Coastal Conservancy's Climate Ready Program. Ella brings a deep commitment to advancing science-based, equitable climate solutions across California's coast. She holds a B.S. from the University of Delaware and an M.A. from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies.

The NOAA's Office for Coastal Management (OCM) provides public data, decision support tools, and training to increase our nation's resilience to coastal hazards and a changing climate. The Sea Level Calculator is a screening tool to visualize sea level rise trends and projections based on historical water level data. This presentation will demonstrate how the Sea Level Calculator and adjacent coastal inundation tools can help San Diego decision-makers boost their preparation for coastal hazards in the current and upcoming decades. Liana Heberer is the West Coast Region Geospatial Analyst, focused on technical assistance to communities in WA, OR, and CA for the suite of OCM's geospatial products and data. Liana is from Oceanside, previously worked for 6 years with the NOAA Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla, and earned her M.S. in GIS from San Diego State University.

## **LEGAL CONCERNS**

None

## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

The agenda notice for today's meeting was posted on the San Diego Water Board's website and sent to subscribers to the email list for Board meetings. This satisfies the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act requirements to publish the meeting notice and agenda.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

None.