

Letter 20

August 16, 2017

State Water Resources Control Board  
C/O: Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board  
P.O. Box 100  
Sacramento, CA 95812-2000



**Re: Proposed Amendments to Bacteria Provisions & Water Quality Standards**

Dear SWRCB Board & Staff:

Please accept the following comments on behalf of Klamath Riverkeeper, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, and Institute for Fisheries Resource in response the proposed changes in bacteria provisions.

20.01 Klamath Riverkeeper supports the State Board's decision to maintain the narrative objective for Region 1 (North Coast), which states, "The bacteriological quality of waters of the North Coast Region shall not be degraded beyond natural background levels."

20.02 Our primary concern is the increased numeric objectives for Region 1, which presumably would be used if background levels of fecal indicator bacteria were unavailable or contested. The current numeric standard of 50 cfu of fecal coliform is more protective of public health than the proposed statewide threshold of 100 cfu of *E. coli*. Studies conducted in the Klamath River Watershed suggest that fecal coliform is on average 50% *E. coli* (Genzoli et al. 2015). Thus, 25 cfu *E. coli* would be a comparable threshold to the current numeric object for Region 1. Region 1 should maintain a more protective numeric objective for *E. coli*, similar to what was suggested for Lake Tahoe.

The illness rate of 32/1000 water users is unacceptably high for the people of the North Coast and specifically the Klamath Basin, where water contact is high throughout the year due to cultural, subsistence, and recreational practices. A family of five that swims daily throughout the summer in waters at the proposed *E. coli* threshold of 100 cfu should expect to spend two weeks with a sick family member during the summer (5 people × 92 days = 15 person-sick days).

20.03 For many families in the rural North Coast Region, swimming is not optional, but rather, the only way to cool off when living without air conditioning. Further, ceremonial and subsistence practices with many of the tribal communities require increased water contact throughout the year, including during run-off events when *E. coli* levels increase.

20.04 To better protect public health, the State Board should adopt Beach Action Values (BAVs) that guide public notifications of bacterial contamination. BAVs were suggested in the EPA Recreation Water Quality Criteria, but were not addressed in the State Board's Bacteria Provisions. The citizens of California deserve to know if water is

contaminated as soon as possible, rather than waiting six weeks for a geometric mean.

20.05

It would be irresponsible for the state of California to significantly weaken the current bacteria thresholds that residents of the North Coast are accustomed to. We expect our streams to be protected from pollution and for polluters to be held accountable for cleaning up and restoring degraded waters.

20.06

Clean water should be a public resource for all to enjoy and backtracking on water quality standards does not represent the public interest. As such, we oppose statewide adoption of the LREC-1 criteria and seasonally removal of REC-1 criteria, which would allow for loopholes for increased bacterial pollution.

We agree with, and wish to incorporate by reference, the comments submitted by the Karuk Tribe and Quartz Valley Indian Reservation which address these bacteria standards.

We hope that the State Board seriously considers our concerns about downgrading the current protective level for fecal indicator bacteria in the waters of the North Coast, and assigns bacteria thresholds that are at a minimum, equally protective as the current standards.

Sincerely,



Konrad Fisher, Executive Director, Klamath Riverkeeper,  
(On behalf of Klamath Riverkeeper, Pacific Coast Federation of Fisherman's  
Association, and Institute for Fisheries Resource.)