

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
September 8, 2010

ITEM: 18

SUBJECT: Information Item: Assessing the Health of San Diego Region Waters (*Bruce Posthumus*)

PURPOSE: This is an information item. No action will be taken.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice was provided in the agenda mailing and posted on the San Diego Water Board's website.

DISCUSSION: Background, Needs, and Shortcomings
State and federal water quality law is intended to protect and restore the health of waters of the state and nation, respectively. Waters can be considered healthy to the degree that they support beneficial uses. Reliable and timely information about the health of San Diego Region waters is essential to:

- (a) Enable efforts to protect and restore their health to be strategic, efficient, and effective; and
- (b) Provide for meaningful evaluation of the progress and effectiveness of such efforts.

Appropriate monitoring and assessment is needed to produce such information. Effective communication of such information to various audiences, including the public, is needed to facilitate understanding, dialogue, and support.

Unfortunately, even though the San Diego Water Board requires dischargers to conduct monitoring in various waters, and even though dischargers devote substantial resources to such monitoring, important basic information about the overall health of these waters is **not produced** (because appropriate monitoring, assessment, and/or reporting of results is not done), **not timely** (because monitoring, assessment, and/or reporting of results is infrequent, irregular, and/or delayed), and/or **not well disseminated or communicated** (because monitoring and assessment results are difficult to find, recognize, use, and/or understand).

The mostly programmatic, compliance-oriented approach to monitoring applied thus far does not allow an understanding of the overall health of regional waters, evaluation of environmental outcomes, nor the ability to judge the success of meeting the San Diego Water Board's Mission. Answering these questions requires the San Diego Water Board to view water quality through a regional lens that coordinates utilization of all monitoring resources.

Solution

In order to correct these shortcomings, San Diego Water Board staff has begun to lay the groundwork for development and implementation of new and improved monitoring and assessment programs for various types of waters in the San Diego Region. These programs will be designed to address four basic public concerns about the health and beneficial uses of water bodies, i.e.:

- a. Is the water safe to drink?
- b. Are fish and shellfish safe to eat?
- c. Is the water safe for swimming?
- d. Are ecosystems healthy?

These programs will be developed and implemented in keeping with a vision, goals, and guiding principles (drafts of which are outlined in Attachment 1).

In addition to systematic, long term "status and trends" monitoring and assessment that will be at their core, these programs will include additional monitoring and special studies as needed (e.g., to investigate cause and effect relationships, determine sources and pathways, and test new monitoring methods and approaches).

Development and implementation of these monitoring and assessment programs will involve considerable work and many details. Dischargers and other interested parties will be asked to participate in the collaborative development of these programs. Dischargers will be primarily and collectively responsible for funding these programs. These programs and the information they produce need to be accountable and credible to the San Diego Water Board, the public, dischargers, and other parties with responsibilities for or interests in public health, natural resources, and regulation. San Diego Water Board staff will maintain active participation in, leadership of, oversight of, authority over, and responsibility for development, implementation, and management of these programs.

In order to facilitate implementation of these programs, certain existing San Diego Water Board monitoring requirements may be discontinued, reduced, reconfigured, or modified so that resources can be redirected to monitoring that produces more important and more useful information. Dischargers and other interested parties will be asked for their recommendations on such changes.

The first phase of this work is focused on monitoring and assessment programs for ocean waters, enclosed coastal waters (harbors, bays, lagoons, estuaries, etc.) and stream systems.

Fortunately, there are existing monitoring and assessment programs in the San Diego Region and elsewhere that provide useful models and foundations for development and implementation of new and improved monitoring and assessment programs. One of these is the San Francisco Bay Regional Monitoring Program (SFB RMP) (<http://sfei.org/rmp/>), which was initiated by the San Francisco Water Board in 1992. More than sixty dischargers participate in the SFB RMP. These include publicly owned wastewater treatment plant operators, industrial dischargers, stormwater dischargers, and dredgers. Among other products, the SFB RMP now produces an easy-to-understand “glossy” annual report (<http://sfei.org/rmp/pulse>) that includes an update on the status and trends of the health of San Francisco Bay.

Staff will provide periodic reports to the San Diego Water Board on the progress of development and implementation of these monitoring and assessment programs and the information they produce.

KEY ISSUES: None.

LEGAL CONCERNS: None.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS: *Attachment 1*
DRAFT Vision, Goals, and Guiding Principles for Monitoring and Assessment of San Diego Region Water Bodies

RECOMMENDATION(S): None