



March 4, 2024

Ben Dorfman  
Ocean Protection Council Sea Grant Fellow  
Transmitted via email: [ben.dorfman@resources.ca.gov](mailto:ben.dorfman@resources.ca.gov)

**RE: Sea Level Rise Guidance – Public Comment**

Mr. Dorfman and Members of the Ocean Protection Council:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and the League of California Cities (Cal Cities), thank you for the opportunity to comment on the recently released Draft Sea Level Rise Guidance document, “State of California Sea Level Rise Guidance: 2024 Science and Policy Update” (Draft Guidance). CSAC represents all of California’s 58 Counties including its 19 coastal members. Cal Cities advocates on behalf of California’s 482 towns and cities, including 61 cities in the coastal zone. Both CSAC and Cal Cities prioritize planning to strengthen climate change resilience and disaster preparedness as a core local government function. This letter is submitted as public comment to the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) in a timely manner for the March 4, 2024 deadline. Specifically, we offer the following recommendations and commendations on the Draft Guidance.

**A. Local governments support the following updates included in the Draft Guidance:**

- The inclusion of multiple sea level rise scenarios and time scales.
- The elimination of H++ as a probable scenario.
- Predictions, backed by the updated science, of sea level rise at slower rates and a narrower range of variability, and that there are higher degrees of confidence in these predictions.
- Acknowledgment that adaptation planning and projects require local and regional collaboration and decision making.
- Alignment of national datasets (e.g. National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration) with state and local data.

**B. Local governments request the Draft Guidance provide greater recognition of the role local governments play in the decision-making, planning, design, and implementation of strategies that incorporate sea level rise.**

Overall cities and counties support the ongoing local, state, and regional efforts to plan for coastal flooding and sea level rise. However, we see this in the context of not just sea level rise but the relative impacts of tides and storm events. There is much uncertainty inherent in the Draft Guidance—from incorporating ever-evolving science and adaptive management measures, to the use of the high scenario given the level of uncertainty associated with it. With a less than one percent chance of the high scenario conditions transpiring, we support:

- **Distinguishing between risk assessment and design standards:** The Draft Guidance should clarify the need to assess, understand, and disclose possible impacts from the high sea level rise scenario, while recognizing that, in many cases, local and regional planning, design, and

construction may be more appropriately based on lower scenarios, with consideration of adaptation pathways that can be implemented if higher scenario conditions come to pass.

- **Recognizing the local government role in local decision-making and participation in evolving policy:** Local governments are the laboratories for integrating the updated sea level rise information in the Draft Guidance and their role should be distinguished upfront in the document. We encourage the OPC to engage directly with local governments for the continued improvement of policies and guidance.

**C. Local governments recommend changes to the technical methodologies that underlie the sea level rise and risk scenarios in the Draft Guidance.**

In general, the methodology to develop sea level rise scenarios could use additional context and explanation. This will be important for community discussions during planning and project development. We would appreciate greater context to the nature of “low confidence” in the predictions of the high sea level rise scenario and clarification that low confidence processes included in the definition of the other scenarios as well. Additionally, we offer the following specific change recommendations:

- The predicted level of sea level rise for each scenario, at each milestone (2050, 2100, 2150) should be reconciled with the median and range of various emission pathways (SSP1-1.9 through SSP5-8.5LC), see Figure 2.4.
- The Draft Guidance should use one system of measurement throughout the document, preferably the metric system.
- The relative impacts of sea level rise, king tides, and storm events should be described with greater clarity.
- The methodology for developing sea level rise scenarios should be confirmed consistent with standard approaches to hazard and risk assessment (e.g. those used for seismic hazard and risk).

**D. Local governments recommend the Draft Guidance expand with greater detail and clarify the link between scientific projections and policy guidance.**

Building confidence and trust within communities is a bedrock of local government planning and management. As the science is evolving, it is very difficult for local officials and staff to explain why the highest sea level rise scenarios must be used when the probabilities of these scenarios are so low. The recommendation to use the high scenario despite the low confidence for all critical infrastructure can erode community trust and impede planning and projects. Throughout the Draft Guidance, the following language is currently included: “deep uncertainties and ambiguity”, “...a statement about the likelihood of reaching this scenario is not possible...”, and “it should be used with caution...” We also observe that the intermediate scenario is considered the “reasonable upper bound for most of the likely range” and the intermediate-high scenario predictions for 2100 “corresponds to other scientific estimates of high-end projections.” These statements are difficult to reconcile with the use of the scientific data for land use planning and practical community-based decisions in coastal jurisdictions.

The Draft Guidance should reference that meteorological data, risk, hazard assessment, and observed data will also inform decision making. In some instances, use of the high scenario, for which there is low confidence, may impede other policy goals such as prioritizing vulnerable communities who rely on such critical infrastructure. Specifically, the Draft Guidance should revise these references to the high scenario as ‘considerations’ that local governments should analyze and disclose but allow cities and counties to make such scenario determinations based on the variety of data, information, and local conditions facing their communities.

We respectfully submit these comments on behalf of California's counties, cities, and towns. For more information, please contact Catherine Freeman, CSAC Senior Legislative Advocate, at [cfreeman@counties.org](mailto:cfreeman@counties.org) or Melissa Sparks-Kranz, Cal Cities Legislative Affairs Lobbyist, at [msparkskranz@calcities.org](mailto:msparkskranz@calcities.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Catherine Freeman  
Senior Legislative Advocate  
CSAC

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melissa J. Sparks-Kranz". The signature is cursive and includes a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Melissa Sparks-Kranz  
Legislative Affairs Lobbyist  
Cal Cities