

California Coastal Commission
**Local Government Workshop on
Sea Level Rise Adaptation Planning**

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Thursday, December 17, 2020
9:00 am – 1:00 pm
Virtual Meeting

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Please note this summary document is the facilitation team’s attempt to summarize key discussion items, and is not a complete transcription of the conversations had. The phrasing contained herein is that of the facilitators and was edited and added to by the SLR Working Group members.

I. OVERVIEW

The California Coastal Commission (CCC) held a joint workshop with the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and the California League of Cities (Cal Cities) on Thursday, December 17, 2020 to discuss sea level rise adaptation planning and how to address sea level rise within the Local Coastal Program (LCP) context. This Local Government Workshop was the fifth held between the Coastal Commission and locally elected officials for the purpose of fostering coordination on a variety of issues through the LCP process. Previous workshops were held in 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2019.

A key achievement since the July 2019 workshop is the establishment of the local government Sea Level Rise Working Group (SLR Working Group). This Working Group includes members

from CSAC, the Cal Cities, the Coastal Commission, and Commission staff, and has been meeting regularly over the past year to continue focused discussions on sea level rise planning. Notably, this group developed a *Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning*¹ that was adopted during the November 2020 Commission Hearing. This Joint Statement includes a set of shared principles for how the Coastal Commission and local governments can move forward to address sea level rise through LCP policy development, adaptation planning, and project decision making. The Joint Statement also details three specific topic areas with opportunities for action over the short term to advance sea level rise adaptation planning, including:

- Establishing shared vision, scope, and time horizons associated with LCP updates.
- Maintaining statewide consistency while flexibly addressing unique local issues.
- Evaluating how a regional approach might address the coastal resource impacts of sea level rise adaptation in the near and longer-term future.

The main goals for the December 17, 2020 workshop were to present the recently adopted *Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning* and to discuss next steps for sea level rise planning. In particular, the SLR Working Group sought to understand priorities for work efforts in 2021, including discussion on potential work products, deliverables, and other activities that will help to advance sea level rise adaptation planning.

II. OPENING STATEMENTS BY SLR WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

Members of the SLR Working Group were introduced:

- Commissioner Carole Groom, California Coastal Commission
- Commissioner Mike Wilson, California Coastal Commission
- Supervisor Bruce Gibson, San Luis Obispo County, CSAC
- Supervisor Lynda Hopkins, Sonoma County, CSAC
- Supervisor John Leopold, Santa Cruz County, CSAC
- Mayor Ed Waage, Pismo Beach, Cal Cities
- Mayor Pro Tempore Jill Hardy, Huntington Beach, Cal Cities
- Councilmember Ed Spriggs, Imperial Beach, Cal Cities
- Councilmember Eric Friedman, Santa Barbara, Cal Cities
- Jack Ainsworth, Executive Director, California Coastal Commission
- Madeline Cavalieri, Statewide Planning Manager, California Coastal Commission

SLR Working Group members were invited to reflect on the Joint Statement and goals/priorities for 2021 coordination on sea level rise.

Ed Waage, Mayor, Pismo Beach and Chair of the Cal Cities Coastal Group expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to address the Commission and local government colleagues.

¹ <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2020/11/W6d/w6d-11-2020-exhibits.pdf>

He stated the *Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning*, developed by the SLR Working Group, underscores the need for regional approaches to sea level rise adaptation planning, while also providing for statewide consistency. Cal Cities, CSAC and Commission have all recently approved this *Joint Statement*, and it will serve as the foundation for SLR Working Group efforts in the coming year. Mayor Waage is pleased with the progress made by this Group to date, and is optimistic about the prospects and opportunities for continued collaboration in the coming year.

Ed Spriggs, Councilmember, Imperial Beach stated that the Cal Cities Board of Directors has, for the first time, adopted a set of priorities for the coming calendar year that includes addressing sea level rise and climate change related challenges. This is evidence of Cal Cities' endorsement of the principles described in the *Joint Statement*, commitment to continued collaboration with local government and state agency colleagues on these critical issues, and in seeking ways to harmonize statewide and regional environmental needs with unique, localized community conditions.

Jill Hardy, Mayor Pro Tempore, Huntington Beach, and former Vice Chair of Cal Cities Coastal Group expressed positive sentiments regarding the efforts of the SLR Working Group to develop the *Joint Statement*. Eric Friedman, Councilmember City of Santa Barbara and current Vice Chair of Cal Cities Coastal Group introduced himself as the newest member of the SLR Working Group, and echoed comments supporting statewide collaboration on SLR adaptation planning.

Lynda Hopkins, Supervisor, Sonoma County, provided opening comments on behalf of CSAC and her county colleagues on the SLR Working Group. She thanked the Commission for hosting the Local Government Workshop and supporting continued, critical collaboration. She stated the SLR Working Group fully endorses the sea level rise *Principles for Aligned State Action*², adopted by state agencies in May 2020. The SLR Working Group appreciates the support of the Commission in developing the *Joint Statement*. Together, the *Principles for Aligned State Action* and *Joint Statement* provide a strong, shared vision for the State of California in the face of climate change. Supervisor Hopkins acknowledged historical tensions between local governments and the Commission, and shared that much progress has been made through hosting of the Local Government Workshops, and the increased engagement/collaboration over the last year via the SLR Working Group. The SLR Working Group supports solutions that prioritize public coastal access and prevent *unmanaged* retreat. Local governments look forward to collaborating on mutually beneficial projects that utilize the best available science, protect natural resources, and accommodate unique local conditions. Local governments and state agencies may differ in their approaches to sea level rise adaptation planning and implementation. However, under the banner of aligned principles, the hope is to develop a toolbox of resources that allow coastal communities and the State to be proactive, rather than reactive, to climate change impacts. Supervisor Hopkins looks forward to making progress with the Commission and SLR Working Group on this issue in 2021.

² https://slcprdwordpressstorage.blob.core.windows.net/wordpressdata/2020/04/04-29-2020_76.pdf

Commissioner Mike Wilson expressed gratitude for the cooperative efforts of the SLR Working Group members. He stated there are many climate change related challenges putting stress on the State and local governments. It is necessary to better understand these stressors, which are ever changing over time and space, in order to address this complex problem. The very complexity of the issue requires the need for continued, and increased, collaboration among state and local governments. The SLR Working Group will begin broadening its understanding of how to better work together on this issue, including considering tools such as special districts and Joint Power Authorities (JPAs) to support regional approaches to adaptation planning and mitigation. Commissioner Wilson recognized the need to balance both consistency and flexibility in adaptation and implementation. Like his SLR Working Group colleagues, he is feeling hopeful for continued work in 2021.

Commissioner Carole Groom expressed her appreciation for the work conducted by her SLR Working Group colleagues from CSAC, Cal Cities, and the Commission. She is supportive of the positive working relationships that have been established through this effort, and also looks forward to continued progress in the coming year.

Mark Gold, Executive Director, Ocean Protection Council (OPC) and Deputy Secretary for Ocean and Coastal Policy, California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) stated he is very encouraged by the efforts of the SLR Working Group. He reminded participants that Governor Gavin Newsom recently declared climate resilience a top priority for State. CRNA worked jointly with the Commission, CalEPA and fifteen other agencies to develop the *Principles for Aligned State Action* previously described. He is pleased to see the seven basic principles outlined therein are consistent with the *Joint Statement* developed by the SLR Working Group. OPC understands the critical nature of this issue, and fully supports collaborative partnerships among and between local and state agencies to address the challenge with haste. OPC will award \$8 million for coastal resilience planning and projects in February of 2021. OPC is also working with the Commission and San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development District (BCDC) to award \$2 million for sea level rise adaptation planning, and another \$500,000 in non-competitive funds for high-profile SLR planning needs. It is likely another round of competitive funding will be issued in late 2021.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Members of the public were invited to provide comments specific to the workshop topic, and were encouraged to aid the SLR Working Group by: offering suggested goals for sea level rise adaptation planning and projects; examples of successful, locally-relevant, regionally-accountable adaptation planning (may include for fire, flood or other disturbance); and suggestions on communities, information or knowledge the SLR Working Group may consult.

The following summarizes verbal public comment only. All public comment submitted in written form can be viewed on the Commission website³.

- A few public members from Pacifica shared their opinion that the City of Pacifica is dependent upon a seawall to protect housing, businesses, hotels, and by extension, the tourist industry.
- Several public members from Pacifica stated support for highly localized or regional strategies to protect their community from sea level rise. They also expressed support for continued, and increased, collaboration between local jurisdictions and state agencies such as the Commission.
- A public member from Marin County referenced a submitted written comment describing how sea level rise adaptation principles are carried out in their area.
- Several public members from Marin County stated support for the following: the SLR Working Group's *Joint Statement*; phased approach to LCP planning and implementation, including short- and long-term adaptation measures; collaboration with local stakeholders and local governments; allowing for local flexibility in adaptation; equity and public access.
- A public member from Marin County supported planning and decision making based on best available science, and further encouraged members to consider related climate resilience strategies, such as alternative transportation.
- A public member from Oceano stated this area is at risk of flooding, and encouraged local governments to address this concern.
- Several members from Surfrider Foundation (San Diego, Los Angeles, Orange County chapters) were pleased at the collaboration of the SLR Working Group and the development of the *Joint Statement*. They encouraged continued efforts to be driven by best available science, and advocated for creative solutions to the issue of sea level rise, in support of both statewide consistency and local flexibility. Members supported a phased approach to adaptation planning, while recognizing the urgency of the situation and need to take immediate action in certain communities. Surfrider's stated position on coastal armoring is as a last-resort adaptation strategy.
- Several members from Surfrider Foundation advocated for the preservation of natural shoreline processes, for example by establishment of living shorelines. Examples of projects include Cardiff natural shoreline and Mission Bay wetlands restoration in San Diego County.
- A member from Surfrider, San Diego chapter suggested the SLR Working Group connect with the Center for Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation at Scripps Institute of Oceanography. In addition, the SLR Working Group should provide for discussions with low income communities and coastal tribal communities.

³ <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2020/12/SM-Th3/SM-th3-12-2020-corresp.pdf>

- A member from Surfrider, San Diego chapter who also serves on the City of Del Mar Sea Level Rise Technical Advisory Committee said that Del Mar’s recent unsuccessful planning effort may be a useful example for lessons learned. The Committee developed a trigger-based adaptation plan that included managed retreat. However, due to highly funded lobbying by private property owners, the effort dissolved.
- A member from Surfrider, Santa Barbara Chapter, shared the area is already experiencing major coastal erosion issues. They supported a regional approach to planning, and recommended maintaining sand supply to local beaches. They also suggested the SLR Working Group consider how to address the probable misuse of emergency permits in this arena.
- A member from Surfrider, Los Angeles Chapter, said that sea level rise threatens to release legacy contaminants buried in this area. Bold planning is needed to avoid disproportionate impacts to Environmental Justice and tribal communities. They further stated that the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic has amplified the value of open space.
- A few members from Surfrider, Orange County chapter, shared their opposition for shoreline armoring, and stated support for living shorelines and managed retreat.
- A member from Surfrider, South Bay Los Angeles, shared personal accounts of infrastructure flooding and damages due to sea level rise. They hope that LCPs include more of an emphasis on both armoring and managed retreat.
- A member from California Coastkeeper Alliance hopes the state and local governments obtain the resources they need to comprehensively plan and prepare for sea level rise. They drew attention to recently passed Assembly Bill 67 which will require a state agency to consider the current and future impacts of sea level rise when planning, designing, building, operating, maintaining, and investing in infrastructure located in the coastal zone or otherwise vulnerable to flooding from sea level rise or storm surges, or when otherwise approving the allocation of state funds for those purposes.
- A member from Smart Coast California shared their organization is highly interested in collaborating with the SLR Working Group and Commission on this issue. They are in support of tailoring solutions to local needs and local values.
- A member from Venice Beach suggested the SLR Working Group collaborate with building and safety agencies regarding infrastructure in the coastal zone. They also supported natural solutions to adaptation planning, and strongly encouraged the collaboration and consultation with local tribes on related efforts.
- A member from the Association of Realtors, Pacifica, stated the opinion that managed retreat is a useful tool in lesser populated areas of the coastline.
- A member from Sierra Club encouraged tribal participation in sea level rise planning efforts. They noted that desalination plants will be subject to the impacts of sea level rise, which is a critical concern. They further shared an example of a successful managed retreat effort along the mouth of the Ventura Rivers.

- A few members of the public shared concerns about the possible permitting for new development in the coastal zone, including houses with basements, hotels, and desalination plants, and encouraged the Commission to consider such issues carefully.
- A member from Heal the Bay shared their support for the collaboration of the SLR Working Group and efforts made to date. They supported the use of best available science, the need for urgent actions to be taken, and use of nature-based solutions.
- A member from Long Beach stated that local governments may need more encouragement and/or financial support to respond quickly to sea level rise. They stated resources would be better used adapting to, rather than fighting against, sea level rise.
- A member from Pacifica thanked the Commission for recent leadership on the issue, and encouraged all parties to pursue the difficult conversation of managed retreat, and increase public education efforts on the issue of sea level rise.

IV. DISCUSSION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SLR WORKING GROUP IN 2021

Following public comment, participating Commissioners, City, and County officials discussed goals and objectives for the SLR Working Group in 2021. In order to frame the session, meeting facilitator Caelan McGee of Zephyr Collaboration displayed the following guiding questions:

- Are there recent examples of phased or flexible approaches to Sea Level Rise planning that you would like to highlight for Working Group consideration (e.g., essential infrastructure protection and relocation)?
- What specific issues or initiatives would you like to see the SLR Working Group address in 2021?
 - What can be accomplished in the coming year?
 - Are there projects or ideas ripe for implementation?
 - What lessons have been learned regarding plan implementation?
 - How can we advance efforts to obtain funding for sea level rise activities at the local level from State and Federal entities and/or NGOs?
- Are there specific communities, interests, agencies or groups with whom you think coordination is important?

Many of the Commissioners and local government officials attending provided comment. The following is an attempt by the facilitator to summarize key themes during the meeting. These themes are collected as feedback and guidance for the Working Group, but do not represent agreements or commitments by any member or organization:

- Urgency and action: sea level rise is an urgent matter requiring immediate attention. It is critical to act now and make specific progress in the near term.

- Examine all adaptation planning and projects through a lens of equity and social justice. Do the work necessary to reach to various communities, and include them in discussions and planning processes.
- It is important to include feasibility in discussions of planning and projects. This includes feasibility related to funding, legal frameworks, political will, community buy-in, etc.
- Costs for adaptation measures should be distributed equitably, to the extent possible.
- A common goal is to avoid *unmanaged* retreat.
- Regional approaches to adaptation planning offer more options, and therefore, potentially better outcomes.
- Support creativity and innovation in seeking our solutions.
- Understand how different modes of coastal access (beyond pedestrian access to beaches) could meet Coastal Act requirements in local and regional SLR adaptation approaches.
- JPAs, Public Private Partnerships, and establishment of special districts are examples of tools that could support regional coordination for adaptation planning. They would also be useful for accountability and continued funding. See as an example: Beach Erosion Authority for Clean Oceans and Nourishment (BEACON) in southern CA.
<https://beacon.ca.gov>
- Some infrastructure will face threats sooner than others. Triggers and thresholds for phased approaches to adaptation planning are desirable, with the acknowledgment that such an undertaking is complex.
- Realize the value of public education in order to generate awareness and support of adaptation planning and implementation. Partner around statewide and local education and outreach efforts.
- It is important to meet communities “where they are” on sea level rise discussions. Where reluctance or resistance may exist, incorporate that into phased approaches to serve goals of public education and advancing understanding. Highlight successful projects, as well as the efforts still needed. Find unity around common experiences, like flooding, inundation, king tides, etc. Homeowners in the coastal zone may benefit from specific, careful messaging. Focus on implications and consequences to public health, the environment, economy, etc.
- A focused education program for local governments could be beneficial.
- Moving from conflict to collaboration on these issues is incumbent upon everyone. All Californians have a stake in this.
- Consolidate lessons learned on sea level rise adaptation. Identify best practices. Develop a toolkit for local, regional and statewide planning.
- Consider how best to support planners at the local level (during LCP development and beyond). Consider funding pilot and case studies on implementation activities.

- Keep in context the ultimate driver that is climate change. Communities will have to adapt in near- and medium-term, but it is important to continue advancing the discussion on overall climate change costs and implications.
- Conduct joint lobbying to seek funding to support efforts. Leverage other initiatives such as the Governor’s “30 by 30” commitment, the pledge to conserve 30% of land and coastal waters by 2030.
- Clear messages about public trust and equity will be essential to secure funding.
- There are other threats to beaches and coastal access than just SLR. It may be beneficial to consult the California Coastal Sediment Working Group.
- While a statewide assessment may highlight some tension with locally-focused solutions, it could also offer a promise of more-informed prioritization of efforts.
- Legislative and policy reform are also essential to support strong adaptation and resiliency efforts.
- Associated legal liabilities for cities and counties is a concern (e.g., takings issue).
- Support coastal communities to develop LCPs if they do not yet have one.
- Coordination with other agencies is necessary. Suggestions include State Parks, State Lands Commission, CalTrans, CRNA, Army Corps of Engineers, Department of the Interior, Ocean Protection Council.

V. WORK PLANNING FOR 2021

Commission members and SLR Working Group members were invited to share additional observations on priorities for the SLR Working Group efforts and deliverables in 2021, and offer suggestions to support work planning for the coming year. The following comments were made:

- There is a need to balance long term efforts, such as public education campaigns and development of regional solutions, with the requirement of the Commission to respond to monthly challenges/ decisions being brought forth by local jurisdictions at Commission meetings.
- Develop stronger partnerships with other state agencies on sea level rise planning and adaptation, particularly State Parks and Caltrans.
- Opportunities for virtual meetings and reduction in travel may offer opportunities for more frequent meetings and discussions. Discussions can then become more available to the public, and support public education efforts.
- The SLR Working Group should utilize feedback shared today and develop a list of actionable items to begin work on in 2021. A mid-year check in with the Commission and local governments may be beneficial for monitoring progress.

- A suggestion was made for the SLR Working Group to draft a letter/ joint statement to the Governor’s Office articulating the collaboration between state and local governments on this issue in order to secure support and funding for efforts. For example, funding could be secured through Resiliency Bond. Commissioners Bochco and Hart offered to act as liaisons for such an effort, provided Brown Act provisions are maintained.
- SLR Working Group is suited to provide insight and guidance related to public education efforts, though state and local agencies themselves will be required to develop and roll-out educational programs.
- Highlight case studies on what has worked and what has failed, to generate best practices and lessons learned.
- SLR Working Group should invite planners, technical and topical experts to their meetings and discussions when appropriate.
- SLR Working Group could consider the formation of subgroups to address topical issues.
- Several commented that the current size of the SLR Working Group is appropriate for effective and productive meetings.

VI. CLOSING

Jack Ainsworth, Executive Director, California Coastal Commission, expressed his deep appreciation for the efforts of the SLR Working Group members and their commitment to building productive relationships. He specifically thanked Supervisor Leopold and Mayor Pro Tempore Hardy for their participation on the Working Group, as their participation on the Group will conclude in 2021.

Chula Vista Councilmember Steve Padilla, Chair, California Coastal Commission, similarly expressed his gratitude for the SLR Working Group, stating this nascent collaboration is a key piece of the architecture of the Coastal Act.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 pm.

VII. ATTENDANCE

Local Government Officials

- Supervisor Lynda Hopkins, Sonoma County, CSAC
- Supervisor John Leopold, County of Santa Cruz
- Supervisor Bruce Gibson, County of San Luis Obispo
- Mayor Ed Waage, City of Pismo Beach
- Mayor Pro Tempore Jill Hardy, Huntington Beach, Cal Cities
- Councilmember Eric Friedman, City of Santa Barbara
- Councilmember Ed Spriggs, City of Imperial Beach

California Coastal Commissioners

- Commission Chair Steve Padilla
- Commissioner Vice Chair Donne Brownsey
- Commissioner Sara Aminzadeh
- Commissioner Dayna Bochco
- Commissioner Linda Escalante
- Commissioner Caryl Hart
- Commissioner Mark Gold
- Commissioner Carole Groom
- Commissioner Erik Howell
- Commissioner Jeremiah Ketchum
- Commissioner Roberto Uranga
- Commissioner Mary-Ann Warmerdam
- Commissioner Mike Wilson

Staff

- Jack Ainsworth, Executive Director, California Coastal Commission
- Madeline Cavalieri, Statewide Planning Manager, California Coastal Commission
- Caelan McGee, Senior Facilitator, Zephyr Collaboration
- Megan Wylie, Senior Facilitator, Zephyr Collaboration