Governor's Plan to Consolidate Water Boards Could Harm Water Quality in San Diego

Enviromental groups oppose the move that would limit local representation, public participation at important hearings

SAN DIEGO, May 7, 2012 — WiLDCOAST, San Diego Coastkeeper, and Environmental Health Coalition announced today their opposition to Governor Brown’s proposed plan to consolidate the Colorado River Basin and San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Boards.

As they operate now, these regional boards protect and enforce water quality standards and regulate polluters throughout the state. The governor’s plan would create a single, 23,900-square-mile regulatory region out of two distinctly different water basins. It would also require the public to travel to board meetings at locations alternating in San Diego, Orange, Riverside and Imperial counties.

On April 25, the state senate’s Subcommittee on Resources, Environmental Protection, Energy and Transportation voted to continue reviewing the governor’s proposal to consolidate the regional boards. They are expected to take action at their May 9 meeting in Sacramento.

"This proposal would severely hinder public participation in meetings," says Jill Witkowski, San Diego Coastkeeper’s Legal Clinic Director. "It’s already challenging enough for the San Diego public to attend hearings in Kearny Mesa, with the lack of public transportation to the offices. The sheer size of the area that the combined regional board would cover would prevent interested people and groups from standing before the board members to have their concerns heard."

San Diego’s regional board focuses on the needs of its mainly urban coastal communities such as sewage treatment, cleaning up toxic contamination in San Diego Bay, and improving stormwater regulations to reduce pollution in the ocean. The Colorado River’s regional water board focuses on addressing the issues of its rural desert communities such as regulating agricultural runoff and replacing septic tanks.

"The governor's plan would mean that San Diego's clean water priorities, like addressing sewage spills onto our beaches or cleaning up the Tijuana River and San Diego Bay, will receive less of the board's attention. This is unacceptable," said WiLDCOAST Conservation Director Ben McCue. "It’s nearly impossible to select a single board to represent such diverse regions and communities."

The proposal will also eliminate two regional water board seats, further limiting attention to San Diego’s key regional water quality concerns including cleanup and abatement, sewage treatment plant compliance, identification and restoration of polluted waters and municipal stormwater permitting.
"The San Diego Regional Board just recently ordered polluters to cleanup the contamination in San Diego Bay. This is a significant achievement for the protection of San Diego Bay and will boost our region’s economy and health," said Environmental Health Coalition’s Laura Hunter. "With a consolidated board, it is inevitable that there will be delays and inadequate attention given to these important regulatory decisions."

According to the environmental groups, the move is also counter to the environmental justice guidelines of the state. The consolidation will make it increasingly difficult for environmental justice communities to participate in important issues before the board and would further limit public participation in water quality hearings. The commutes to meetings could exceed three hours for some stakeholders.

The environmental groups expressed their concerns in a letter written to Senator Joe Simitian, the Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Resources, Environmental Protection, Energy and Transportation.

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ABOUT WiLDCOAST
WiLDCOAST is an international conservation team that works to conserve coastal and marine ecosystems [www.wildcoast.net](http://www.wildcoast.net)

ABOUT SAN DIEGO COASTKEEPER

ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COALITION
Founded in 1980, Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) builds grassroots campaigns to confront the unjust consequences of toxic pollution, discriminatory land use, and unsustainable energy policies. Visit us online at [http://www.environmentalhealth.org](http://www.environmentalhealth.org)