

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS - LAND USE
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 04, 2026**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 3

SUBJECT: APPROVE AND AUTHORIZE EXECUTION OF ASSOCIATE COMMISSION MEMBER AGREEMENT WITH THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COASTAL WATER RESEARCH PROJECT AUTHORITY AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

The County of San Diego (County) works to protect and enhance regional water resources through collaborative planning and science-based investments in multi-benefit projects that improve water quality and ecosystem health. A key strategy in this effort is leveraging regional partnerships that advance initiatives supporting water quality, watershed health, and the science needed to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems. Since 2008, the County has been an associate commission member of the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP). SCCWRP is a joint powers authority composed of Southern California's major wastewater and stormwater agencies, along with State and federal regulatory partners. Through this collaboration, SCCWRP conducts objective, science-based research to better understand how wastewater and stormwater discharges affect coastal aquatic ecosystems and public health.

Membership in SCCWRP enables the County to help shape scientific research that informs effective stormwater management and supports compliance with State and federal water quality mandates, including the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit (Permit). The Permit requires the County and other agencies to eliminate pollution sources entering local waters and has been updated several times since its initial issuance in 1990 to include more rigorous requirements. Since joining SCCWRP in 2008, the County has collaborated with SCCWRP's team of expert scientists on studies that identify and address pollution sources to support regulatory compliance. For example, SCCWRP research has informed strategies for meeting bacteria and nutrient Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements, and investigations such as the Surfer Health Study, Santa Margarita River Nutrient Initiative, San Diego River Investigative Order, and using advanced DNA methods to link Mexican sewage to U.S. beach pollution have provided insight into the most effective approaches for improving water quality. SCCWRP's studies are routinely published in peer-reviewed journals and are widely recognized by regulators and the scientific community. The County's Department of Environmental Health and Quality has also partnered with SCCWRP to develop a faster method for measuring bacteria levels in beach and bay waters, enabling more timely public health notifications.

The County's continued participation in SCCWRP ensures access to regionally coordinated, peer-reviewed science that supports Permit compliance and the County's regulatory position. Through shared regional monitoring programs that fulfill MS4 requirements, membership provides a strong return on investment by reducing duplication and distributing technical costs across member agencies. SCCWRP's applied research on Best Management Practice (BMP) performance further ensures that County investments in structural and non-structural controls are guided by sound science and targeted toward solutions that yield the greatest water quality benefit. These efforts have helped keep Permit requirements practical and avoid unnecessary infrastructure costs for the County and private development projects. If the County withdraws from SCCWRP, we would lose access to shared technical expertise and the regional forum where Permit decisions are shaped. That would reduce our influence, increase the risk of stricter or inconsistent requirements, and likely raise compliance costs.

Membership in SCCWRP provides the County with numerous benefits, the most significant of which include:

- Access to high-quality scientific research at a fraction of the cost of conducting independent studies;
- Greater credibility and influence in shaping regulatory policies grounded in sound science;
- Direct engagement with State and federal regulators through collaborative forums that support strategic and cost-effective compliance planning.

Gives the County a seat at the table to shape practical Permit requirements that protect water quality without driving up unnecessary costs for public and private projects.

The current five-year Associate Commission Member Agreement was approved by the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors on September 16, 2020 (11) and expires on June 30, 2026. Today's request is for the Board to approve the County's continued partnership with SCCWRP. A new five-year Associate Commission Member Agreement would allow continued collaboration among SCCWRP, the County, and participating regulatory and regulated agencies. If approved, the new agreement will extend the County's participation from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2031.

County membership costs would begin at \$150,000 in Fiscal Year 2026-27, with a total not-to-exceed amount of \$796,250 over the five-year term. Funding for Fiscal Year 2026-27 will be requested in the CAO Recommended Operational Plan for the Department of Public Works General Fund. Funding for subsequent fiscal years will be included in future Operational Plans. No additional staff years are required.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Find that the proposed activity is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(3) and 15378. Section 15060(c)(3) specifies that activities which do not cause a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment are not considered "projects." Because entering into a member agreement with the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) will have no impact on the environment, it does not meet the definition of a project and is therefore not subject to CEQA review.
2. Authorize the Director, Department of Public Works, or designee, to execute an Associate Commission Member Agreement with the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project Authority for Fiscal Years 2026-27 through 2030-31, and to execute all amendments to the agreement as necessary and take all action necessary to fulfill the County obligations under the agreement.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's action supports the County of San Diego's (County) ongoing commitment to protecting public health, enhancing community well-being, and advancing regional water sustainability. Through membership in the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP), efforts to reduce pollution to local waterways and protect natural resources directly benefit residents across the region, including in the unincorporated area. In particular, the County is committed to addressing water quality challenges in under-represented communities, which have historically experienced greater impacts from environmental stressors. Ensuring the health of our streams and beaches is essential for providing diverse and accessible recreational opportunities for citizens throughout all regions of San Diego County.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's action to authorize an Associate Commission Member Agreement with the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) contributes to social, health and well-being, and environmental sustainability goals of the County. Continued participation in SCCWRP enables regional collaboration and investment in projects that improve water quality and protect critical habitats across San Diego County. Through SCCWRP, the County contributes to research and initiatives that support regulatory compliance with Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for pollutants such as bacteria, nitrogen, and phosphorus, while focusing on the most critical contaminants in our local watersheds. These efforts focus on protecting human and aquatic health while preserving recreational benefits for the community.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with today’s recommendation in Fiscal Year 2025-26. If approved, funds for this request will be included in the Fiscal Year 2026-27 CAO Recommended Operational Plan in the Department of Public Works (DPW) General Fund - Watershed Protection Program. If approved, this request will result in costs and revenue of \$150,000 in the Fiscal Year 2026-27. The total cost over the five-year agreement period will not exceed \$796,250. The funding source is existing General Purpose Revenue allocated to the DPW General Fund - Watershed Protection Program. Funding for subsequent fiscal years will be included in future Operational Plans. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ACTION:

ON MOTION of Supervisor Montgomery Steppe, seconded by Supervisor Aguirre, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended, on Consent.

AYES: Aguirre, Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe, Desmond

State of California)
County of San Diego)

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed
by Andrew Potter