

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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May 28, 2015

TO: Coastal Commission and Interested Parties

FROM: Charles Lester, Executive Director
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Sea Level Rise Team

SUBJECT: Briefing on the Revised Draft Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance
DISCUSSION ITEM ONLY. Initial Public Hearing. Public Hearing will remain open until proposed Commission Action in August 2015.

I. Summary

On May 27, 2015, the California Coastal Commission released a [public review draft of the Revised Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance](#). This Revised Draft is an update to the [Draft Sea-Level Rise Policy Guidance](#) released on October 14, 2013. The Guidance provides recommendations for local governments, applicants, and others for how to address sea level rise in Local Coastal Programs and Coastal Development Permits. It also provides a background of the best available science on sea level rise, and describes the importance of avoiding hazards and protecting coastal habitats and Coastal Act resources as sea level rises.

This briefing memo reviews the purpose, content, and scope of the document and discusses the revisions that were made to the document in response to both public comments and recent events.

For more information and to download the draft document, visit:
<http://www.coastal.ca.gov/climate/slrguidance.html>

In addition to the opportunities for comments during Commission hearings, written comments can be submitted to SLRGuidanceDocument@coastal.ca.gov.

II. Background

Sea level rise has long been a concern for the Coastal Commission because the potential impacts from sea level rise hazards fall directly within the Coastal Commission's planning and regulatory responsibilities under the Coastal Act. Sea level rise increases the risk of flooding, coastal erosion, and saltwater intrusion into freshwater supplies, which have the potential to threaten

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many of the resources that are integral to the California coast, including coastal development, coastal access and recreation, habitats (e.g., wetlands, coastal bluffs, dunes, and beaches), coastal agricultural lands, water quality and supply, cultural resources, community character, and scenic quality.

As part of its ongoing work to address these issues, the California Coastal Commission Strategic Plan for 2013-2018 identified several actions for the Commission staff and partner organizations to take to address sea level rise and climate change. Specifically, Strategic Plan action item 3.1.1 includes the adoption of sea level rise policy guidance for use in Local Coastal Program planning and project design.

In partial fulfillment of this action item, the Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance has now been drafted, extensively reviewed by the public, and revised by Coastal Commission staff. The basic contents of the Guidance include: Guiding Principles for addressing sea level rise in California's coastal zone; a discussion of the best available science on sea level rise and its possible impacts; step-by-step guidance for addressing sea level rise in Local Coastal Programs and the Coastal Development Permit process; descriptions of a variety of possible adaptation strategies; a discussion of the legal context of sea level rise adaptation planning; and detailed appendices with technical information and additional resources. As procedural guidance, this document is not a regulatory document and does not contain any new regulations.

The Revised Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance fits into an active state effort to address sea level rise and climate change. It was developed in close coordination with *Safeguarding California*, the statewide climate adaptation plan developed in 2014 by the California Natural Resources Agency. It reflects the broad concepts and strategies in *Safeguarding California* —particularly the Coast and Oceans chapter — and complements it by providing information more specific to the Coastal Act, including Local Coastal Programs and Coastal Development Permits. This effort also supports the *Resolution of the California Ocean Protection Council on Implementation of the Safeguarding California Plan for Reducing Climate Risks*.

The Guidance also complements recent state actions related to sea level rise adaptation. For example, Governor Brown's April 2015 Executive Order B-30-15 directs state agencies to take climate change into account in their planning and investment decisions. AB2516, authored by Assemblymember Gordon and approved in September 2014, establishes a Planning for Sea Level Rise Database that is anticipated to be available online in early 2016. The database will provide the public with an educational tool from which to learn about the actions taken by cities, counties, regions, and various public and private entities to address sea level rise.

The document also implements many of the recommendations from President's State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience. For example, it provides tools and assistance to support sea level rise decision making, establishes a framework for state, local, and federal partnership and coordination on sea level rise, and provides guidance on how to improve resilience of California's coastal infrastructure, natural resources, human communities, and coastal industries. Governor Brown, Supervisor Carbajal (Santa Barbara County), Mayor Garcetti (Los Angeles), and Mayor Johnson (Sacramento) are all members of

this Task Force. Additional state and federal efforts related to sea level rise are discussed throughout the Revised Guidance, particularly in the Introduction.

III. Document Development

The Guidance was developed using funds from NOAA Coastal Zone Management grant award and the staff time of a NOAA Coastal Management Fellow, a Sea Grant Fellow, and a Sea Grant Extension Fellow, among other Commission staff. The Draft Guidance was released on the Coastal Commission's website on October 14, 2013 for a 120-day public comment period, following an inter-agency review. During this public comment period, the Commission received 105 public comment letters. After careful review, Commission staff broke the letters down into over 800 individual comments and responded to each. These responses are provided in table format in the [California Coastal Commission Response to Comments](#) on the October 2013 Draft Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance.

Commission staff conducted extensive outreach to solicit feedback on the 2013 Draft from all interested and affected parties to ensure that the revised document is clear, easily accessible, and relevant to local governments, applicants, and others throughout the state. Staff has arranged (and continues to arrange) public hearings, meetings, and presentations throughout the state to allow local governments, applicants, and others the opportunity to voice any questions or concerns about the document, and to offer suggestions for improving the utility of the document. Staff conducted over 30 outreach events, including 2 public webinars, a focused webinar for local governments, meetings with agency partners, conferences presentations, and other state hearings. Commission staff presented the content of the Draft Guidance at the December 2013 and January 2014 Coastal Commission hearings in San Francisco and San Diego, respectively.

Since the release of the first draft, Coastal Commission staff revised the Guidance to reflect comments from the public, requests for additional information, and new developments in sea level rise science and related state and federal activities. A summary of the most substantial revisions is provided below.

IV. Summary of Revisions

Commission staff made extensive revisions to the document based on feedback from Commissioners, agency partners, scientists, the public, and others. These revisions included a variety of minor edits, organizational changes, and additional information. A summary of the most significant changes is provided below.

- 1. A new section on using scenario-based analysis to approach sea level rise planning.**
Chapter 3 of the Revised Guidance now includes an extensive discussion of scenario-based analysis of future sea level rise impacts. It explains why the best available science on sea level rise provides projections in ranges, and how scenario-based analysis can be used to provide a robust understanding of possible future impacts to coastal resources from sea level rise and to hone in on adaptation approaches.

2. **A new section on storms, extreme events, abrupt change, and sea level rise.** Chapter 3 of the Revised Guidance now includes a description of how storms and extreme events could impact coastal resources in California in conjunction with sea level rise.
3. **A new section on sea level rise adaptation planning and environmental justice.** Chapter 4 of the Revised Guidance describes how sea level rise, and how we respond to it, may result in significant changes in the distribution of environmental benefits, or environmental justice, in California.
4. **A revised chapter on sea level rise adaptation strategies, including additional strategies.** The Revised Guidance provides all adaptation strategies in a single chapter, Chapter 7, and organizes strategies by coastal resource and planning goal. This new organizational system, along with new strategies, should enable readers to more quickly find information useful for their particular purposes.
5. **A new chapter on the legal context of adaptation planning.** Chapter 8 now describes the legal context of adaptation planning, including discussions of seawalls and other shoreline protective devices, the public trust boundary, and potential private property takings issues.
6. **New text about recent developments in sea level rise science and state and federal actions.** The Revised Guidance includes discussions of new sea level rise-related science and state and federal actions that have occurred since the release of the first Guidance draft in October 2013. Some of these subjects include: the IPCC 5th Assessment Report, the Third National Climate Assessment, Governor Brown's Executive Order B-30-15, AB2516, and Safeguarding California.

V. Coordination with Other Coastal Commission Programs

The Ocean Protection Council, Coastal Conservancy, and Coastal Commission have all recently administered grant programs to fund sea level rise vulnerability assessments, adaptation efforts, and LCP updates, many of which focus on updates to address sea level rise. These programs dovetail directly with the Revised Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance. Grantees have already been coordinately closely with Commission staff on these efforts, and as local governments implement the grant work programs, they will be drawing on the Guidance for direction. Once acted upon by the Coastal Commission, the Revised Guidance will continue to provide local governments with important guidance and resources with which to conduct this important work.