

Sea Level Rise Working Group JOINT STATEMENT ON ADAPTATION PLANNING

Approved Version 11.06.2020

The California Coastal Commission, the California State Association of Counties, and the League of California Cities together agree on the following joint statement of guiding principles, opportunities and challenges associated with proactive and effective sea level rise adaptation for California's coastal communities. It focuses specifically on what these three entities, while working together, can do to address sea level rise in coastal California, specifically relating to Local Coastal Program (LCP) policy development, adaptation planning, and project decision making.

This Joint Statement was developed in light of the recent 'Principles for Aligned State Action' (State Principles), which were developed by 17 participating State agencies under the leadership of Secretary Crowfoot of the California Natural Resources Agency and Secretary Blumenfeld of the California Environmental Protection Agency¹. The Joint Statement aligns with and seeks to carry out the State Principles.

State and Local Challenges of Adapting to a Changing Coast

- Extreme storm and weather events are changing the coast of California, which sea level rise is expected to exacerbate, causing increased flooding and inundation, coastal erosion, changes in sediment supply and movement, and saltwater intrusion to water supplies.
- The degree of impact and rate of change sea level rise has on coastal communities and ecosystems varies widely along the State's 1,200-mile coastline.
- These increasing coastal hazards will have significant impacts on coastal economies and put coastal resources and development at risk.
- Sea level rise hazards will disproportionately impact the ability of people who cannot afford to live in close proximity to the ocean to access and recreate along the coast, including those from underserved and vulnerable communities.
- Sea level rise adaptation solutions are resource intensive and each has its own economic, environmental, and social trade-offs; these costs and benefits will also change over time as sea levels continue to rise.
- Choosing an adaptation strategy now may influence options for the future as well as options in adjacent locations. Some options may benefit a few at the expense of many, while others may benefit many at the expense of a few.

Shared Principles to Guide Adaptation Planning and Projects

The California Coastal Commission, the California State Association of Counties, and the League of California Cities together pledge to:

- Plan for sea level rise adaptation in a way that is responsive and flexible, and based on unique local community contexts.
- Work for creative planning solutions that provide for local flexibility at the LCP and community level and statewide consistency at the policy level.
- Engage and collaborate with all stakeholders, including community members, visitors, business owners, and tribal groups, as well as underserved and other vulnerable communities who live, visit, and recreate along the coast to ensure equitable participation in adaptation planning processes, and equitable outcomes from decisions.

¹ http://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/media_library/2020/05/State-SLR-Principles_FINAL_April-2020.pdf

- Incorporate the best available science on sea level rise into guidance, policies, plans, and permits and have explicit processes for updating these with new information.
- Develop phased approaches to adaptation based on thresholds that trigger future policy and planning reviews and updates.
- Disclose the location, type, timeframe, and severity of coastal hazards due to sea level rise to property owners and the public, for example, through risk disclosure policies, conditions on permits, or publicly available vulnerability assessments.
- Create and refine new tools to support adaptation, such as regional mitigation to offset impacts to public beaches, to achieve better environmental, economic, and community outcomes over the long term.
- Strive for agency cultures and procedures that support predictable and efficient planning, permitting and project delivery.
- Commit to progress over perfection; develop policies and plans that highlight incremental progress in the near-term to lay a foundation for, but not preclude, longer-term progress and outcomes.
- Focus on and prioritize public infrastructure planning to model opportunities for innovative adaptation strategies that benefit coastal resources and communities.

Creative Solutions and Actions

The California Coastal Commission, the California State Association of Counties, and the League of California Cities pledge to working together on the opportunities and actions presented by the following top three challenges:

Establishing shared vision, scope, and time horizons associated with LCP updates

Historically, the Commission has approached LCP updates based on a presumption that the LCP will not be updated again for many years to come. As a result, Commission staff often suggest policy recommendations that will result in long-term efficacy. Conversely, local jurisdictions often develop LCP policy updates with shorter timeframes in mind. In other words, they draft policies that are digestible and actionable for their communities in the near term. This disconnect often spawns a continuous comment and feedback loop between the state and local entities that results in an unreasonably long, and sometimes failed, LCP update process.

- **Opportunity:** The Commission and local governments can agree on clear and established timeframes under which the LCP update will be operable. Identifying the appropriate scope and time horizon for the update (e.g., for the next 10-20 years) can help support actionable sea level rise policies and adaptation planning approaches. The entities could agree that the present round of policy updates will not be the last, and commit to multiple, more regular updates rather than one major update.
- **Action:** The Commission and local governments agree to co-develop guidance on an improved LCP update process that supports more frequent and incremental or ‘phased’ updates to LCPs, including identifying appropriate time horizons for policy application, ‘first order’ policy language, and future update requirements.

Maintaining statewide consistency while flexibly addressing unique local issues

The Commission works to maintain a degree of statewide consistency across LCP updates to remain consistent with Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act and avoid inconsistent or arbitrary regulatory interpretation. Local governments seek maximum flexibility to address local issues and struggle with ‘one size fits all’ policies that are born from the state’s efforts to maintain statewide consistency.

- **Opportunity:** The Commission and local governments agree that while some degree of statewide consistency is important, all LCP updates should address unique local issues. As a result, not all LCP updates will look the same from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. However, all LCP updates should include baseline hazards policies and concepts, including requirements to use the best available science, policies on disclosure and assumption of risks related to sea level rise hazards, and policies to ensure that new development is appropriately sited.
- **Action:** Draw from recent certified LCP updates to compile successful examples of the baseline policies and concepts detailed above that achieve an appropriate balance between statewide policy consistency and local LCP flexibility. This compilation can serve as a future reference for both local jurisdictions and CCC staff when developing and providing comments and feedback on future LCP updates.

Evaluating coastal resource impacts now and in the future in light of sea level rise, and identifying viable mitigation sites to offset those impacts

- **Opportunity:** California communities need creative phased approaches to adaptation planning to protect communities, infrastructure and coastal resources. Near-term adaptation strategies that impact coastal resources and public trust lands need to be mitigated. The entities can collect the best available mechanisms to value coastal resources and coastal access points to help plan for different activities and accessibility as coastal environments change with sea level rise and mitigate impacts that may arise.
- **Action:** State and local governments agree to work together to develop shared guidance on pathways to creative solutions while properly evaluating, limiting, and mitigating coastal resource impacts. This should include exploring the concept of regional planning and mitigation opportunities across jurisdictions.