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# W6d

October 28, 2020

TO: California Coastal Commissioners and Interested Public

FROM: John Ainsworth, Executive Director  
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SUBJECT: **Briefing and consideration of adopting the Local Government Working Group “Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning”**

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## SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Following the July 2019 Local Government Workshop, a Local Government Working Group consisting of representatives from the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the League of California Cities, and a Coastal Commission subcommittee (Commissioners Groom and Wilson) was formed. Over the past year, this group has worked to develop a joint statement to serve as a foundation for our collective efforts on sea level rise adaptation planning. A draft version of the Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning was released in October. After considering the input received from the public and Coastal Commissioners during the October hearing, the Working Group revised the Joint Statement to clarify the intent to be consistent with State efforts related to sea level rise planning and to broaden the focus of the last action item to address the need to explore all types of phased adaptation strategies as well as regional opportunities for mitigation. The final version of the Joint Statement is included as [Exhibit 1](#).

The Joint Statement includes a set of guiding principles, challenges, opportunities, and actions associated with proactive and effective sea level rise adaptation for California’s coastal communities. It focuses specifically on what the three entities which make up the working group can do to address sea level rise, specifically relating to Local Coastal Program (LCP) policy development, adaptation planning, and project decision making.

The Joint Statement is consistent with and complementary to the Coastal Commission’s ongoing work to address sea level rise, including the Statewide Principles for Aligned State Action which were adopted by the Coastal Commission in May 2020.

Staff is recommending **adoption** of the Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning.

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### **EXHIBITS**

[Exhibit 1 – Local Government Working Group Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning](#)

## **I. MOTION AND RESOLUTION**

### **Motion:**

I move that the Commission adopt the Local Government Working Group “Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning”.

### **Staff Recommendation of Approval:**

Staff recommends a **YES** vote. Passage of this motion will result in the Commission’s adoption of the attached Local Government Working Group joint statement on sea level rise adaptation planning. The motion passes only by an affirmative vote by a majority of the Commissioners present.

### **Resolution of Approval:**

The Commission hereby adopts the Local Government Working Group “Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning”.

## **II. DISCUSSION**

### **A. Background**

Following the July 2019 Local Government Workshop, a priority action item was to establish a local government working group to develop strategies to improve collaboration and communications between local governments and the Commission on sea level rise adaptation planning and Local Coastal Program (LCP) updates. This Local Government Working Group includes representatives from the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the League of California Cities, and a Coastal Commission subcommittee (Commissioners Groom and Wilson).

Over the past year, the Local Government Working Group has worked to develop a set of shared principles that will provide a foundation for our collective efforts on sea level rise adaptation planning going forward. The Joint Statement outlines guiding principles, opportunities, challenges, and actions associated with proactive and effective sea level rise adaptation for California’s coastal communities. It highlights what the entities that make up the working group can do, while working together, to address sea level rise in coastal California. The Joint Statement focuses specifically on Local Coastal Program (LCP) policy development, adaptation planning, and project decision-making. A draft version of the Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning was released in October. After considering the input received from the public and Coastal Commissioners during the October hearing, the Working Group revised the Joint Statement to clarify the intent to be consistent with State efforts related to sea level rise planning and to broaden the focus of the last action item to address the need to explore all types of phased

adaptation strategies as well as regional opportunities for mitigation. The final version of the Joint Statement is summarized below and included as [Exhibit 1](#).

The recommended adoption of the principles by the Commission, League of Cities, and CSAC will set the stage for the December 17, 2020 Local Government Workshop that will focus on the next steps regarding how we will apply these shared principles to advance the development of meaningful sea level adaptation plans and LCP updates for coastal jurisdictions across the state.

## **B. Summary of the Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning**

The Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning is built around an understanding that sea level rise, combined with storms and extreme events, will exacerbate the coastal hazards that are already changing the California coastline through increased flooding, inundation, erosion, changing sediment dynamics, and saltwater intrusion. These increasing hazards will cause significant impacts to coastal resources and communities. The type and scale of impacts will vary widely across the State, but without careful planning, sea level rise hazards will threaten critical infrastructure and communities, as well as beaches, recreational areas and habitats. In addition, without careful planning, sea level rise 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. At the same time, sea level rise adaptation strategies can be resource intensive, and different strategies each have their own economic, environmental, and social trade-offs that will change over time.

In recognition of these challenges, the Local Government Working Group developed 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 full set of shared principles can be reviewed in [Exhibit 1](#), and generally include a pledge to do the following:

- Develop creative adaptation strategies that are responsive and flexible, and based on unique local community contexts.
- Engage and collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure equitable participation in adaptation planning processes, and equitable outcomes from decisions.
- Incorporate the best available science on sea level rise and have explicit processes for updates based on 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.
- Create and refine new tools to support adaptation that will allow for better environmental, economic, and community outcomes over the long term.

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- Strive for agency cultures and procedures that support predictable and efficient planning, permitting and project delivery and commit to progress over perfection.
- Focus on and prioritize public infrastructure planning to model opportunities for innovative adaptation strategies that benefit coastal resources and communities.

The Joint Statement also details three specific topic areas with opportunities for action over the short term to advance sea level rise adaptation planning (see [Exhibit 1](#) for more detail).

1. **Establishing shared vision, scope, and time horizons associated with LCP updates.** The Commission and local governments can agree on clear and established timeframes under which the LCP update will be operable (*e.g.*, for the next 10-20 years) to help support actionable sea level rise policies and adaptation planning approaches and, further, to co-develop guidance on an improved LCP update process that supports more frequent and incremental or ‘phased’ updates to LCPs.
2. **Maintaining statewide consistency while flexibly addressing unique local issues.** The Commission and local governments agree that LCP updates should both address unique local issues and include baseline hazards policies and concepts (*e.g.*, use of best available science, policies on disclosure and assumption of risks, and policies to ensure that new development is appropriately sited) to ensure consistency with the Coastal Act. The Local Government Working Group can draw from recent certified LCP updates to compile successful examples of baseline policies and concepts that achieve an appropriate balance between statewide policy consistency and local LCP flexibility.
3. **Evaluating coastal resource impacts now and in the future in light of sea level rise, and identifying viable mitigation sites to offset those impacts.** The Local Government Working Group recognizes the need for creative phased approaches to adaptation planning to protect communities, infrastructure, and coastal resources and agree to work together to develop shared guidance on approaches that will appropriately evaluate, limit, and mitigate coastal resources impacts over time. In particular, this should include exploring regional planning and mitigation opportunities across jurisdictions.

## C. Relationship to Statewide Principles for Aligned State Action on Sea Level Rise

The Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning directly relates to the Coastal Commission’s ongoing efforts to address sea level rise. In particular, a key priority for the Coastal Commission has been to support local government efforts to plan for sea level rise, specifically by integrating sea level rise adaptation into Local Coastal Program updates. The Joint Statement reflects the challenges and opportunities related to LCP updates and sea level rise planning that have been identified over the past several years following the adoption of the CCC Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance and

the provision of funds for LCP updates through the LCP Local Assistance Grant Program. Importantly, the Joint Statement also identifies key action items for continued collaboration among the working group entities to advance the development of meaningful sea level adaptation plans and LCP policies.

Additionally, the Joint Statement is consistent with and helps to implement the [Statewide Principles for Aligned State Action](#), which was co-developed by 17 participating state agencies, including the Commission, and which was formally adopted by the Commission in May 2020<sup>1</sup>. Both documents are built around a shared recognition of a basic set of facts about sea level rise, including that sea level rise, combined with extreme storms and tidal events, will exacerbate coastal hazards along the state's coastline. The documents acknowledge that increasing coastal hazards will likely result in significant impacts to coastal communities, economies, and resources, highlighting the critical need for proactive adaptation planning.

The Joint Statement and the work of the working group help to implement and reflect key goals of the Statewide SLR Principles. In particular, two of the Statewide SLR Principles are to “build coastal resilience partnerships” (principle 2) and to “support local leadership and address local conditions” (principle 4). The working group is designed to increase coordination and collaboration among the Coastal Commission and local jurisdictions and to build understanding of local priorities and needs as well as key statewide goals and baseline targets (all of which are highlighted as key actions within principles 2 and 4).

Both the Joint Statement and the Statewide SLR Principles are built around a shared recognition of the science and projected impacts of sea level rise in our state, including that sea level rise, combined with extreme storms and tidal events, will exacerbate coastal hazards along the state's coastline. The documents acknowledge that coastal hazards will increasingly result in significant impacts to coastal communities, economies, and resources, and reflect a commitment to proactive adaptation planning.

Further, the Joint Statement and the Statewide SLR Principles share many of the same goals and recommended actions. Key areas of alignment include principles in both documents related to:

- Incorporating best available science into planning and decision-making (Statewide SLR Principle 1, Joint Statement Shared Principles Bullet 4)
- Recognizing the need for adaptation that is flexible and based on local conditions (Statewide SLR Principle 4, Joint Statement Shared Principles Bullet 1 and 2)
- Engaging with all stakeholders, including vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and ensuring members of the public understand the risks

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Statewide Principles for Aligned State Action on sea level rise, including how the Principles relate to the Commission's ongoing sea level rise work, see the May 2020 [staff report](#)

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associated with sea level rise (Statewide SLR Principles 2 and 3, Joint Statement Shared Principles Bullet 3 and 6)

- Developing tools, guidance, processes, baseline targets, etc. that help promote efficient and effective permitting for adaptation projects (Statewide SLR Principles 5 and 6, Joint Statement Shared Principles Bullets 2, 7, 8 and 9)
- Recognizing the need for additional research, pilot projects, innovative approaches, and funding to support adaptation efforts (Statewide SLR Principles 5 and 6, Joint Statement Shared Principles Bullets 4, 5, 7 and 10)
- Prioritizing protection of public infrastructure, including critical infrastructure and coastal-dependent uses (Statewide SLR Principles 1 and 6, Joint Statement Shared Principles Bullet 10)
- Prioritizing strategies and approaches that achieve multiple benefits, including better environmental, economic, and community outcomes over time (Statewide SLR Principles 5 and 6, Joint Statement Shared Principles Bullets 7 and 10)

The main difference between the two documents is that the Joint Statement includes more detail that is specific to the LCP planning process as it relates to sea level rise adaptation. Actions within the Joint Statement related to LCP planning and LCP policies include developing guidance and processes that will allow for more incremental or phased LCP updates; identifying policies that will allow for local flexibility while also meeting baseline statewide goals (e.g. use of best available science, disclosures of hazards, and siting for new development); and developing options and policies for phased adaptation, including consideration of how to balance, limit, and mitigate coastal resource impacts on a regional scale across jurisdictions.

Although these topics are not discussed in detail in the Statewide SLR Principles, they are broadly implicated in Principles 4, 5, and 6 which all relate to developing and implementing SLR adaptation strategies that protect the range of coastal communities and resources along the California coast in a way that reflects local conditions and is responsive to changes over time.

Overall, the Joint Statement on Adaptation Planning is consistent with and complementary to the Coastal Commission's ongoing efforts to address sea level rise. Further, adoption of Joint Statement will help to implement many of the Commission-adopted Statewide Principles for Aligned State Action to address sea level rise, notably to build partnerships and to support local leadership and address local conditions. The Coastal Commission is appreciative of the efforts of the Local Government Working Group to develop a shared approach for moving forward to address the challenges of sea level rise through local planning and LCP updates, and staff recommends adoption of these principles.