



project clean water

## **Science and Technology TAC Basin Planning Issues Technical Workgroup**

Meeting Summary  
December 4, 2002

The Basin Planning Issues Technical Workgroup met for the third time on December 4 to discuss the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board's upcoming triennial review of its Basin Plan. Sheri McPherson opened by briefly summarizing the results of the workgroup's previous meeting on November 6. At the November 6 meeting, Regional Board staff outlined the steps involved in a triennial review, and described the type of information that stakeholders might submit in support of the process. All meeting summaries can be downloaded from the Project Clean Water website at [www.projectcleanwater.org/html/wg\\_basin\\_planning.html](http://www.projectcleanwater.org/html/wg_basin_planning.html).

At this meeting, Regional Board staff described the information requirements involved in changing a water quality objective to a more or less stringent standard. The presentation was followed by a discussion between stakeholders and Regional Board staff.

### Regional Board Presentation

Lesley Dobalian, Regional Board, began by outlining the major steps of the Basin Plan amendment process. Dave Barker, Regional Board, then provided a description of the information requirements involved in adopting site-specific water quality objectives. Adopting a site-specific objective involves a process very similar to the one required to change a water quality objective. Copies of both presentations are available for downloading at the web address above. Below are some of the major points of the presentation.

- Any person, municipality, county, corporation, or organization may propose site-specific criteria, but the burden is on the requestor to provide the necessary data and supporting information.
- Site-specific water quality objectives can be developed for the following reasons:
  - EPA criteria are under or over protective at a particular site
  - The sensitivities of the site species differ from the national data set
  - The site's physical or chemical characteristics alter the bioavailability or toxicity of the pollutant
  - Bioassessment and/or toxicity testing indicate that the aquatic community is, or is not, adversely impacted by current discharges
  - Chemical characteristics of the effluent or receiving water (e.g. high suspended solids or organic carbon) suggest reduced pollutant toxicity
  - An untested (or highly sensitive) species is present at the site.
- The requestor must: define site boundaries, determine the effect of constituents on bioavailability and toxicity, and calculate numerical criteria.

- There are three protocols which can be used to establish site-specific objectives. The recalculation procedure can be used if site species are more or less sensitive than those in the EPA database upon which the criteria is based. The water-effects ratio procedure can be used if the site's physical or chemical properties affect the bioavailability or toxicity of certain pollutants. The resident species ratio procedure is usually too costly due to the amount of testing required and sample size.
- The following are constraints to relaxing or deleting water quality objectives:
  - Must conform to State Resolution 68-16
    - Maximum benefits to the people of the State
    - Must not unreasonably affect beneficial uses
    - Must not result in water quality lower than prescribed in applicable policies
  - Must conform to federal anti-degradation regulations (40 CFR 131.12)
    - Not allowed in Tier 1 Waters – those that do not meet fishable / swimmable goals or lack assimilative capacity
    - Not allowed in Tier 3 Waters – outstanding national resource waters
  - Must still protect most sensitive beneficial use
  - Must be necessary to accommodate social or economic development

## Discussion

Workgroup participants engaged Regional Board staff with a number of questions. The major points of discussion are summarized below.

- The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed policy guidance laying out the information requirements involved in changing federal water quality objectives. Any effort to change such an objective would therefore be subject to these requirements.
- In response to a question regarding the type of data needed to change a nutrient objective, Regional Board staff responded that EPA is in the process of developing national criteria for nutrients, which will establish guidelines for setting site-specific objectives. Similarly, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) is developing state nutrient objectives that will also establish guidelines for developing site-specific standards. The state guidelines are expected about one year from now.
- Regional Board staff indicated that it would be difficult, but not impossible, to demonstrate the inappropriateness of a standard across more than one basin – data would be required to demonstrate the similarity of conditions across basins.
- Regional Board staff noted that most of the site-specific water quality objectives that have been developed to date involve mineral constituents in groundwater. Changing groundwater objectives is often easier than changing surface water objectives since groundwater is not subject to federal requirements or aquatic toxicity standards. All Basin Plan amendments since 1975 are listed in the back of the Basin Plan.
- Many stakeholders were interested in knowing whether water quality objectives or beneficial uses could incorporate a seasonal component – that is, a waterbody would be held to different standards at different times of year. Regional Board staff responded that federal law does allow for the designation of beneficial uses on a seasonal basis; however, “seasons” would have to be narrowly defined due to the San Diego region’s temperate climate. It was

suggested that differentiating beneficial uses by “storm event” versus “dry weather” might be a more plausible approach in many cases.

- The Regional Board committed to providing a presentation on the use attainability analysis (UAA) process, which is required to remove a beneficial use. This would likely occur sometime closer to commencement of the triennial review. Staff indicated that the Regional Board should know the schedule for initiating the triennial review by the time of this workgroup’s next meeting in January.

#### Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Basin Plan Technical Workgroup is scheduled for Thursday, January 23rd (9:30 –11:30 am) in the Metro Biosolids large conference room. At this meeting, triennial reviews of other regional Basin Plans will be discussed.