

**CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION**

45 FREMONT, SUITE 2000  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105-2219  
FAX (415) 904-5400  
TDD (415) 597-5885



# W6g

May 1, 2020

TO: California Coastal Commissioners and Interested Public

FROM: John Ainsworth, Executive Director  
Susan Hansch, Chief Deputy Director  
Madeline Cavalieri, Statewide Coastal Program Manager  
Kelsey Ducklow, Environmental Scientist

SUBJECT: **Briefing and consideration of adopting “Making California’s Coast Resilient to Sea Level Rise: Principles for Aligned State Action”**

---

## SUMMARY OF STAFF RECOMMENDATION

In early 2020, Secretary Crowfoot (California Natural Resources Agency) and Secretary Blumenfeld (CalEPA) convened state entities with coastal climate resilience responsibilities, including the Coastal Commission, to develop “Making California’s Coast Resilient to Sea Level Rise: Principles for Aligned State Action” ([Exhibit 1](#)). This effort recognizes that California’s coast, bays, estuaries, and ocean are critical to the state’s environmental and economic security, integral to our quality of life, and an iconic part of the state’s legacy, but face ongoing and increasing threats from climate change and sea level rise. The participating agencies developed the Principles for Aligned State Action in order to improve effectiveness in addressing this immediate challenge.

The principles fall into six main categories: Develop and utilize best available science; build coastal resilience partnerships; improve coastal resilience communications; support local leadership and address local conditions; strengthen alignment around coastal resilience; and implement and learn from coastal resilience projects.

These principles are meant to guide unified, effective action towards sea level rise resilience for California’s coastal communities, ecosystems, and economies, and are consistent with and complementary to the Coastal Commission’s ongoing work to address sea level rise.

Staff is recommending **adoption** of “Making California’s Coast Resilient to Sea Level Rise: Principles for Aligned State Action”.

## Table of Contents

I. MOTION AND RESOLUTION.....	3
II. DISCUSSION .....	3
A. Background .....	3
B. Summary of Principles for Aligned State Action .....	4
C. Relationship to Ongoing CCC Sea Level Rise Work.....	5

### **EXHIBITS**

[Exhibit 1 – Making California’s Coast Resilient to Sea Level Rise: Principles for Aligned State Action](#)

## I. MOTION AND RESOLUTION

### Motion:

I move that the Commission adopt “Making California’s Coast Resilient to Sea Level Rise: Principles for Aligned State Action”.

### Staff Recommendation of Approval:

Staff recommends a **YES** vote. Passage of this motion will result in the Commission’s adoption of the attached state sea level rise planning principles. The motion passes only by an affirmative vote by a majority of the Commissioners present.

### Resolution of Approval:

The Commission hereby adopts “Making California’s Coast Resilient to Sea Level Rise: Principles for Aligned State Action”.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. Background

In early 2020, Secretary Crowfoot (California Natural Resources Agency) and Secretary Blumenfeld (CalEPA) convened state entities with coastal, bay, and shoreline climate resilience responsibilities, with the broad goal of developing a set of principles for use in planning, policy setting, project development, and decision making that will guide a unified approach to addressing sea level rise throughout California. Participants included CNRA, CalEPA, SF Bay Conservation and Development Commission, California Coastal Commission, California Energy Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Caltrans, Delta Stewardship Council, Department of Water Resources, Ocean Protection Council, Governor’s Office of Planning and Research, Office of Emergency Services, State Coastal Conservancy, State Lands Commission, State Parks, State Water Resources Control Board, and Strategic Growth Council.

Together, these agencies recognized that California’s coast, bays, estuaries, and ocean are critical to the state’s environmental and economic security, integral to our quality of life, and an iconic part of the state’s legacy. Yet these coastal areas, and in turn Californians’ safety, local and state economies, critical infrastructure, and natural resources are at risk from sea level rise that could be as much as 7 feet or more by 2100. Combined with shorter-term changes such as extreme storms, King Tides, and El Niño events, many coastal areas are already feeling the effects of sea level rise. Without planning and adaptation, future sea level rise will result in significant impacts to communities, with considerable environmental justice implications, upwards of hundreds of billions of dollars in impacts to property and development, impacts to statewide and

regional water supplies, and damage to or loss of beaches, tidepools, wetlands, and other coastal habitats.

In order to improve effectiveness in addressing this immediate challenge, the participating agencies co-developed and endorsed a set of sea level rise principles for aligned state action. These principles will support and enhance California's ongoing efforts related to climate change mitigation and adaptation, enabling the State to scale up its coastal resiliency efforts by creating consistent, efficient decision-making processes and improving collaboration across state, local, tribal, and federal partners. Such enhanced alignment will support proactive adaptation planning and implementation that will save money, allow communities to test and leverage adaptation solutions, prevent impacts, and improve resiliency of coastal areas and frontline communities. The principles for aligned state action are summarized below and included as [Exhibit 1](#).

## **B. Summary of Principles for Aligned State Action**

1. Develop and utilize best available science
  - Apply best available science to planning, decision-making, project design, and implementation
  - Utilize a minimum target of 3.5 feet of sea level rise by 2050, and more protective targets for 2050/2100 for critical infrastructure
2. Build coastal resilience partnerships
  - Coordinate regularly on SLR resilience issues, policies, planning, processes, mandates, permitting, information, funding, and projects
  - Collaboratively collect, share, and publicize the latest information on SLR
  - Build strong relationships with all partners at all levels of government, and with the public, nonprofits, businesses, and other stakeholders
  - Coordinate and partner with tribes to ensure inclusive and multicultural stewardship of lands and waters subject to SLR
3. Improve coastal resilience communications
  - Align SLR messaging and implement a coordinated public awareness and education campaign
  - Increase transparency, efficiency, and alignment of state and local coastal resilience processes, policymaking, and decision-making
4. Support local leadership and address local conditions
  - Support local planning and adaptation policies and projects that address local and regional conditions
  - Evaluate and learn from local conditions
  - Prioritize early protection of and capacity building for the most under-resourced and vulnerable frontline communities
5. Strengthen alignment around coastal resilience

## W6g (Sea Level Rise Principles)

- Develop and apply baseline, Administration-wide SLR assumptions, projections, targets, terms, and standards into coastal projects, retrofits, planning, funding, regulatory, and permitting initiatives
  - Ensure that up-to-date SLR resilience planning is in place coastwide
  - Collaboratively work to pursue and develop specific funding sources
  - Avoid creating unnecessary duplication of existing state agency authority
6. Implement and learn from coastal resilience projects
- Protect and enhance public trust natural and cultural resources
  - Protect critical public water-dependent infrastructure, ports, harbor districts, and other evolving public trust needs and uses
  - Prioritize the use of nature-based adaptation measures
  - Build coastal resilience by increasing the number of restoration and adaptation projects
  - Prevent impacts from SLR to public access

### **C. Relationship to Ongoing CCC Sea Level Rise Work**

These Principles for Aligned State Action are consistent with and complementary to the Coastal Commission's ongoing efforts to address sea level rise, and adoption of these principles will support and enhance the Commission's efforts to work with local governments, state agencies, tribes, members of the public, and others to ensure protection of coastal resources even as sea levels rise.

In 2015, the Coastal Commission adopted its Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance, which was updated in 2018 to incorporate new sea level rise science and projections. The Policy Guidance includes a set of Guiding Principles that are similar to many of the Principles for Aligned State Action. Some of these include direction to use best available science; to use a precautionary approach by considering high or extreme sea level rise projections, particularly for high-risk decisions like those for critical infrastructure; to consider local conditions, goals, and priorities when developing adaptation strategies; to account for the social and economic needs of the people of the state, including by considering environmental justice implications; to maximize protection of public access, recreation, and sensitive coastal resources, including public trust and water-dependent uses; to maximize natural shoreline values and processes, including through encouraging nature-based adaptation solutions; to coordinate planning and regulatory decision making with appropriate local, state, and federal partners; and to maximize public participation in planning and regulatory processes.

These Guiding Principles guide the Commission's approach to addressing sea level rise, and the new Principles for Aligned State Action will further support these efforts. A critical component of this work is providing best available science on sea level rise projections to use in planning and decision-making. Consistent with the OPC State Sea-Level Rise Guidance, the Commission's Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance, and the Principles for Aligned State Action, the Commission will continue to recognize the 2017

Rising Seas Report and the 2018 State Sea-Level Rise Guidance as best available science, and will work with planners and project applicants to assess an appropriate range of sea level rise scenarios. As reflected in both the OPC and CCC guidance documents, sea level rise analyses should account for the anticipated life of the project/planning horizon, project-specific characteristics such as adaptive capacity and risk tolerance, and acute increases in sea level from extreme storms, tidal events, and other temporary phenomena. Importantly, the statewide guidance and Principles for Aligned State Action recognize the need to incorporate a precautionary approach by considering higher amounts of sea level rise, particularly for high-risk projects like critical infrastructure. The Principles for Aligned State Action also include a target of 3.5 feet of sea level rise by 2050 for planning purposes, which sets a precautionary minimum baseline and which will provide a metric by which to measure statewide progress on adapting to sea level rise.

The Coastal Commission is also committed to coordinating with local governments, state and federal agency partners, tribes, and other stakeholders as called for in the Principles. The Coastal Commission has a long history of working with local governments to address coastal hazards and protect coastal resources. Over the last seven years, the LCP Grant Program has helped support local government efforts to complete sea level rise vulnerability assessments, develop adaptation plans, and update LCPs to better address sea level rise in a way the considers local context as well as statewide goals. The grant program also has and will continue to provide an important information-sharing resource with respect to best practices for planning, consideration of environmental justice challenges, development of specific policy approaches, and implementation of adaptation options.

The Coastal Commission also routinely works with other state and federal partners on projects to plan for and address sea level rise. Examples include coordination with an interagency team to support alignment of LCPs, General Plans, Local Hazard Mitigation Plans and others to ensure coastal resiliency; work with the State Lands Commission on an ongoing project to understand the public trust implications of sea level rise; a formalized Plan for Improved Agency Partnering with Caltrans that includes a focus on addressing sea level rise; and coordination with multiple state agencies to support the Commission's development of adaptation guidance for critical infrastructure. Additionally, the Commission is an active participant in several interagency groups like the State Coastal Leadership Group on Sea Level Rise and various Climate Action Teams that play an integral role in supporting climate change planning and adaptation.

Similarly, the Coastal Commission has and will continue to work with state agencies, local governments, and other project applicants in developing and permitting adaptation solutions and projects that account for sea level rise. Recent adaptation success stories include a managed retreat project at Surfer's Point in Ventura, which included the relocation of a parking lot and bike path, along with beach and dune restoration; the realignment of a portion of Highway 1 near Piedras Blancas to allow for the removal of riprap and restoration of natural shoreline processes; and a living shoreline and dune restoration project in Cardiff to provide protection for a portion of Highway 101. The Coastal Commission also recently certified an amendment to the San Francisco LCP

## W6g (Sea Level Rise Principles)

that lays the foundation for implementing multiple sea level rise adaptation strategies, including the eventual removal of the southern portion of the Great Highway, enhancement of bike and pedestrian access opportunities, and beach and dune restoration. Each of these examples highlight the critical need for strong coordination and alignment between the Coastal Commission and other stakeholders to encourage and support successful coastal resilience strategies.

Lastly, the Coastal Commission has recently adopted both a Tribal Consultation Policy and an Environmental Justice Policy, which both speak to the need to maximize outreach and participation in planning and decision-making more broadly, and in particular to consider underrepresented, vulnerable, differently impacted, and other unique persons or communities. The Principles for Aligned State Action reflect the need to support and work with these communities to ensure adaptation planning is carried out in an equitable and inclusive manner.

The Coastal Commission is encouraged by the enhanced focus on statewide efforts to address sea level rise and support coastal resilience that is reflected in the Principles for Aligned State Actions and staff recommends adoption of these principles.