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July 10, 2015

Commissioners and Staff  
California Coastal Commission  
c/o Sea Level Rise Working Group  
45 Fremont Street, Suite 2000  
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: Draft Sea Level Rise Guidance Document

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Sea Level Rise Draft Guidance document. I express these comments as an individual member of the Oxnard City Council. As a city council member and involved member of my community in Oxnard, I appreciate the opportunity to be involved in such an important civic process. Overall, I am very impressed with the quality, clarity, and depth of the draft guidelines. Sea level rise threatens coastal communities and infrastructures, and we must address this threat proactively. This is not a time for remaining in line with the status quo, or seeking short-term gains. It is a time in which we must think about long-term sustainability, reliability, and safety.

It is also a time in which we must prioritize equity. One weakness in the draft guidance that stands out to me is a lack of attention given to issues of environmental justice. This draft appropriately defines environmental justice using the state of California's definition: "the fair treatment of people of all races, culture and income with respect to the development, adoption, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (Chapter 4: 56). Yet even this discussion of environmental justice -- the best in the entire document --leaves something to be desired. This discussion in chapter four (consequences of SLR) focuses primarily on public access to beaches, and secondarily on other environmental justice issues. Obviously, public access to coasts and beaches is a very important issue to which the California Coastal Commission repeatedly has demonstrated its admirable commitment. Public access can even be an environmental justice issue when disadvantaged communities are unable to pay fees or are otherwise barred from coastal access. Environmental justice in California, however, takes on many more faces than limitations to access. It takes on the face of higher pollution and pesticide burdens for disadvantaged communities, or of

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the placement of power plants or chemical waste facilities in socioeconomically underprivileged communities. Although a later paragraph in this section on social issues associated with SLR acknowledges this complex array of environmental justice issues, it concludes with a startling vague policy guide: "Planners and decision makers should consider environmental justice concerns in the analysis of alternative project designs and adaptation measures" (Chapter 4: 58).

After reading this quote, I assumed more specific guidance on environmental justice would come in later chapters focused on specific strategies and techniques for dealing with SLR, but no such guidance appears. The only social issue consistently addressed is public access to beaches, which usually did not focus on equity issues. The word "justice" (in reference to environmental justice) appears only once in the entire chapter on "Addressing Sea Level Rise in Local Coastal Programs" (Chapter 5). It does not appear even once in Chapter 6 "Addressing Sea Level Rise in Coastal Development Permits" or Chapter 7 "Adaptation Strategies." Due to the fact that these chapters are those in which the CCC aims to provide practical guidance in coastal planning, the CCC fails to provide practical or specific guidance on how to incorporate environmental justice considerations into this planning.

Finally, in the concluding "Next Steps" chapter of the draft guidelines, the CCC acknowledges the lack of information it has put forward on environmental justice by saying that this topic demands further research. Yet public access to beaches is also listed in this section, despite being given more consideration throughout the document. It seems strange to acknowledge that both areas of socio-cultural concern need further research (which they do), but only include policy guidelines for access.

To largely ignore environmental justice in the coastal planning process seems like a significant oversight to me, particularly given the numerous contemporary environmental justice issues along California's coast. As you have already heard about in other public comments, the city of Oxnard is fighting against a proposed additional power plant at the Mandalay Bay facility operated by NRG. For decades, Oxnard has borne a huge environmental burden, particularly in comparison with its wealthier neighbors of Malibu, Ventura, and Santa Barbara. Its coastline already hosts three power plants, including a superfund site. A community with more immigrants, people of lower-socioeconomic status, and English-language learners than many of the other communities in the region, Oxnard consistently has faced environmental injustices. The NRG proposal is one of these environmental justice threats. Not only is the NRG project at odds with the Coastal Commission's guidance for planning for the physical and ecological threats of SLR, but so too does it fail the environmental justice litmus test. It

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is unsafe, unwise, and unfair. The city council of Oxnard for the last two years has unanimously banned expanded and new power plants along our coast, thus temporarily halting the NRG project. Due to the fact that we are in the process of updating our outdated LCP, we are at the mercy of the decisions of the California Energy Commission and Public Utilities Commission. We hope they will respect the impressive work of the California Coastal Commission on SLR. We want to have SLR considered as a critical factor in hearings on the proposed project, at the same time that NRG is attempting to have scientific testimony on SLR stricken from these hearings. There is no compelling reason for this project, and certainly not for placing it along Oxnard's already-overburdened coast. We need to make the right decision for the long-term future, not for the short-term profit.

Thank you for your tremendous service to the state and people of California, and I hope you will consider adding more information about environmental justice to the SLR guidance document. If the CCC seeks to provide guidance on planning for coastal resilience for SLR, it should also provide guidance on planning for environmentally just, equitable, and fair communities. Let's make consistent, sustainable, and smart decisions for the future of California's coasts and people.

Sincerely,

*Carmen Ramirez, City Council Member and Mayor Pro Tempore for the City of Oxnard*  
With the considerable and valuable assistance of Anna Guasco, *Environmental Justice Intern*