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CCKA RELEASES ITS STRATEGIC PLAN TO IMPROVE THE CALIFORNIA WATER BOARDS

October 28, 2020 (Sacramento, CA) – Today, California Coastkeeper Alliance released its [Strategic Plan containing 57 recommendations](#) that the California Legislature, Governor, and the State and Regional Water Boards can take to improve the overall governance of the California Water Boards – and ultimately achieve the Water Boards’ mission to protect and restore the quality of our waterways and ensure clean, accessible water for every California community.

Despite the overarching mission of the Water Boards to protect California’s water, the most recent data provided in the 2018 Integrated Report found that nearly 95 percent of fresh waterbodies assessed across the state were too polluted for drinking, fishing, or swimming. While pollution continues to flow into and through our waters, polluters are rarely held accountable. Historically, Regional Water Board enforcement has been minimal and focused almost exclusively on administrative and reporting violations, failing to address widespread non-compliance. For example, of 3,316 stormwater violations identified by the State Water Board in 2018 and 2019, only 16 received penalty actions from the Water Boards.

“Underserved communities that are already vulnerable to environmental, racial, and economic injustices bear the brunt of our polluted waters,” says Sean Bothwell, Executive Director of California Coastkeeper Alliance. “Four years of weakened federal policies and now funding cuts due to COVID-19 are impacting our state’s ability to protect its water resources, and as we recover from our current economic crisis we must look at the ways our state can dramatically step up its own efforts to ensure that every Californian has access to swimmable, drinkable, and fishable waters.”

The report’s recommendations were derived based on comments, feedback and suggestions made during a series of comprehensive meetings and interviews with state officials, environmental justice partners, and environmental organizations. Below are California Coastkeeper Alliance’s top 10 recommendations for improving Water Board governance:

1. The Legislature should require each Regional Water Board Chair to be a full-time salaried position.
2. The Legislature should classify an existing State and Regional Water Board Member seat to represent environmental justice communities.
3. The Governor and Legislature should support requiring communications between an interested person and the Governor’s Office regarding Water Board appointments to be an *ex parte* communication requiring disclosure.
4. The Governor should provide additional resources to the Water Boards to ensure all permits and policies contain clear and enforceable requirements by requiring the Office of Enforcement to consult with program staff and Board Members on state- and region-wide permits.
5. The Water Boards should create a Watershed Recovery Subaccount within the Cleanup and Abatement Account to proportionally distribute 50% of enforcement fines back to the Regional Water Boards to fund approved SEP projects.

6. The Legislature should create one nonvoting, ex-officio Regional Water Board Member that is represented by the State Water Board Member Regional Liaison.
7. The State Water Board should include an additional 5% fee on permit applications and annual fees to create a community capacity fund to assist environmental justice communities in participating in Water Board outreach and regulatory processes.
8. The Governor should provide additional resources to hire two statewide environmental justice and tribal coordinators to proactively conduct outreach to environmental justice and tribal communities.
9. The State Water Board should use and expand available geospatial tools, such as CalEnviro Screen, to identify and prioritize enforcement cases in environmental justice and underserved communities.
10. The Governor, Legislature, and/or the State Water Board should set a statewide objective with interim milestones to achieve by 2050 the national goal of eliminating all state water impairments.

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ABOUT CALIFORNIA COASTKEEPER ALLIANCE - California Coastkeeper Alliance is a statewide voice for our waters. With the federal administration working against our environmental laws, CCKA defends and expands California's protective legislation and strengthens the function of our State Water Board. We represent local Waterkeepers, empower communities towards a #TrashFree2030, and advocate with companies through the Blue Business Council. Together, we fight for swimmable, fishable, and drinkable waters for Californians today – and for future generations. California Coastkeeper Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. For more information, visit cacoastkeeper.org and follow us on Twitter [@CA_Waterkeepers](https://twitter.com/CA_Waterkeepers).