



**Staff Recommendation**

August 15, 2023

Item 7b

**Action Item:**

**Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds for the Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program 2023: Microplastics Sample Processing and Analysis**

Kaitlyn Kalua, Deputy Director

**Recommended Action:** Authorization to disburse up to \$180,000 to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project Authority (SCCWRP) to process and analyze microplastic samples collected by the Southern California Bight (Bight) 2023 Regional Monitoring Program. This authorization will provide a budget augmentation to an existing grant previously approved by the Council on January 24, 2023.

**Location:** Statewide; Point Conception to California/Mexico border.

**Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives:** Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity; Objective 3.4: Improve Coastal and Ocean Water Quality

**Equity and Environmental Justice Considerations:** This project will process and analyze microplastic samples in areas with high trash generation or water quality impairment, proximity to communities burdened by environmental or social injustice, and/or of biota that are used in subsistence fishing to evaluate the presence or concentration of microplastic particles in areas of high priority or concern.

**Findings and Resolution:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;

2. The proposed project is consistent with the Budget Act of 2022 which included a \$50 million General Fund appropriation for grants or expenditures for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems; and;
3. The proposed project is not a ‘legal project’ that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378.”

Staff further recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$180,000 to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project Authority (SCCWRP) to process and analyze microplastic samples collected by the Southern California Bight (Bight) 2023 Regional Monitoring Program. This authorization will provide a budget augmentation to an existing grant previously approved by the Council on January 24, 2023.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, SCCWRP shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management, and delivery.”

### **Executive Summary:**

Staff recommends that OPC approve the disbursement of \$180,000 to provide a budget augmentation to an existing grant with SCCWRP for microplastics sample collection and method evaluation. This funding will supplement the original microplastics sample collection and method evaluation project conducted by SCCWRP approved at the January 24, 2023 OPC meeting. This funding will apply methods for sediment and shellfish collection determined by the existing project to process and analyze microplastic samples collected by the Southern California Bight (Bight) 2023 Regional Monitoring Program. The results of this study will provide foundational microplastic occurrence data in Southern California on a regional scale.

### **Project Summary:**

The current project as approved by the Council at the January 24, 2023 meeting will produce standard operating procedures (SOPs) for collecting field samples of microplastics in stormwater, sediment, and biota to support consistent environmental microplastics data collection and

monitoring in California. In addition to the objectives described in the [January 24, 2023 staff recommendation](#), this proposed project augmentation will apply sediment and biota methods evaluated in the existing project to extract, quantify, and characterize microplastics collected through the Bight 2023 Regional Monitoring Program to provide foundational microplastic occurrence data in Southern California on a regional scale.

The Bight 2023 Regional Monitoring program provides an opportunity to apply microplastic laboratory methods, sample collection methods for sediment and biota identified by the existing SOP project, and assess the extent and magnitude of microplastic contamination on a regional scale for the Bight the first time. The Bight 2023 program aims to evaluate the occurrence of microplastics in sediments within three different stratum (i.e., estuaries, ports/marinas/embayments, and the inner shelf). In addition, shellfish will also be collected and analyzed for microplastics in up to two species at two different time points.

This project will directly advance the OPC Strategic Plan Goal 3, Objective 3.4 Improve Coastal and Ocean Water Quality, Target 3.4.3: Advance development of a baseline of plastic pollution monitoring data for coastal and marine waters and a standardized approach to track the state’s progress in reducing plastic pollution; and Statewide Microplastics Strategy Objective 2B.1.1: Establish standardized microplastic monitoring methods (sampling and analysis of environmental samples, including marine, river, and estuarine waters, sediment, and fish tissue) with accreditation.

### **Equity and Environmental Justice Considerations:**

Microplastics may disproportionately impact communities burdened by environmental or social injustice due to potential proximity to high trash-generation areas (resulting in the fragmentation of plastic-derived trash and debris into microplastics), industrial and plastic manufacturing facilities, dense highways, among other causes of plastic particle emissions. This project will process and analyze microplastic samples in areas with high trash generation or water quality impairment, proximity to communities burdened by environmental or social injustice, and/or of biota that are used in subsistence fishing and human consumption to evaluate the presence or concentration of microplastic particles in areas of high priority or concern.

### **About the Grantee:**

SCCWRP is a public research and development agency that develops and applies next-generation science to improve management of aquatic systems in Southern California and beyond. Since its founding in 1969, SCCWRP has developed strategies, tools, and technologies that the region’s water-quality management community relies on to more effectively protect and enhance the ecological health of Southern California’s coastal ocean and watersheds.

**Project Timeline:**

The project timeline remains January 2023 – June 2026.

**Project Financing:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$180,000 to SCCWRP to process and analyze microplastic samples collected by the Southern California Bight (Bight) 2023 Regional Monitoring Program.

California Ocean Protection Council	\$180,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$180,000</b>

The anticipated source of funds for this disbursement is the Budget Act of 2022, which included a \$50 million General Fund appropriation to OPC for grants or expenditures for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems. The proposed disbursement and anticipated projects are an appropriate use of this General Fund appropriation because the projects will each provide information to increase the State’s understanding and inform management of microplastic contamination that impact marine wildlife and ocean and coastal ecosystems.

**Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- Improve coastal water quality.
- Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of those resources.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.

### **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):**

The proposed project is not a ‘legal project’ that triggers the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, section 15378. If this project were determined to be a ‘legal project’ under CEQA, the proposed project(s) are categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the projects involve information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. If this were to occur, staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval by OPC.