



**Informational Item**  
December 9, 2024

Item 5

## **Information Item:** **Environmental Justice Advisory Board for California’s Coast and Ocean**

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**Location:** Statewide

**Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives:** Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions; Objective 2.2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities.

### **Exhibits:**

Exhibit A: [Environmental Justice Advisory Board Charter](#)

### **Executive Summary:**

The Environmental Justice Advisory Board (‘EJ Advisory Board’, ‘Board’) for California’s Coast and Ocean was established to advise the State of California on the needs and perspectives of environmental justice communities<sup>1</sup>, and California Native American tribes and tribal communities into state policies, programs, and actions that impact the coast and ocean. This informational report provides an overview of the EJ Advisory Board’s background, role, purpose, and priorities in collaborating with the State of California, through OPC and state partners, as well as how the Board contributes to advancing equity in coastal and ocean efforts across the state.

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<sup>1</sup> The OPC Equity Plan defines environmental justice (EJ) communities as: Communities that are environmentally- and economically-stressed that experience environmental health inequities which contribute to persistent environmental health disparities.

## Background

Following the adoption of the [OPC Equity Plan](#) in October 2022, OPC committed to work closely with agency and other partners to implement the Plan’s ambitious goals and strategies by engaging local and regional community partners to inform statewide ocean and coastal priorities. In April 2023, OPC continued its partnership with [Better World Group](#) (BWG) to advance implementation of key Equity Plan priorities, including pathways for direct engagement with public members representing environmental justice and tribal communities that can provide recommendations to help OPC best implement Equity Plan priorities and establish partnerships to identify regional gaps (OPC Equity Plan, Strategy 3.3.2).

As a result of the ongoing partnership between BWG and OPC to implement the OPC Equity Plan, BWG has developed and convened the EJ Advisory Board to support in advising the state in its efforts to better address the ocean and coastal needs of California communities, including California Native American tribal communities. The EJ Advisory Board is not a creation of or delegated by OPC.

The foundation of the EJ Advisory Board is distinctively tied to increasing active engagement with community leaders representing environmental justice and tribal communities into state policies, programs, and actions that impact the coast and ocean, in direct alignment with the OPC Equity Plan, Tribal Engagement Strategy, and equity goals of the [OPC 2020-2025 Strategic Plan](#). By meaningfully engaging community leaders from environmental justice and tribal communities, the EJ Advisory Board provides unique perspectives to better understand local and regional community needs and aims to ensure that these considerations are embedded in state policies and actions. This approach strengthens the state’s accountability on advancing equity, meaningful engagement, and access to informing decision-making and policy processes that are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of California communities, and ultimately deliver meaningful benefits to underrepresented communities across the state.

## EJ Advisory Board Overview

The EJ Advisory Board comprises of 7-10 members with experience in equity, tribal engagement, environmental justice, and community outreach, chosen through a public application process. Members serve a 12-month term, renewable annually, and meet quarterly to engage with OPC and partners throughout the state. The inaugural Board, administered and facilitated by BWG in coordination with OPC staff, will serve for a three-year term.

## **Purpose and Priorities**

The EJ Advisory Board’s overarching purpose is to provide equity and environmental justice expertise, advising the State of California on how to advance these priorities across its coastal and ocean programs and policies. Specifically, the Board aims to:

1. Elevate ocean and coastal needs and priorities of tribal and environmental justice communities, to help ensure state coastal and ocean actions, including on climate change, are responsive and culturally relevant, and lead to equitable and resilient outcomes for California communities.
2. Support evaluation and reporting efforts by sharing perspectives regarding equity indicators and metrics to measure progress towards the State of California’s goals and environmental justice outcomes.
3. Advise on equitable grantmaking processes to help improve access to funding opportunities and provide meaningful community benefits.
4. Strengthen networks and partnerships with community members, environmental justice leaders, advocates, community-based organizations, tribes, and tribal communities to support inclusive outreach, participation, and meaningful engagement.

The EJ Advisory Board’s role is advisory. This Board does not supersede, replace, or otherwise alter existing law and opportunities for public engagement, nor will Advisory Board members make or participate in making contractual or grant decisions. Members provide advice, share perspectives, and expertise to advance equity across state programs and actions that impact the coast and ocean to better address community needs. This may include, but is not limited to, providing recommendations on policies that build climate resilience, informing inclusive processes, and contributing to effective strategies to engage and support priority communities in accessing state resources.

## **Application Process and Selection**

In January 2024, BWG, in partnership with OPC, publicly released a call for applications to join the EJ Advisory Board, seeking 7-10 individuals to collaboratively engage and provide valuable equity-focused insights and perspectives to inform priorities that affect California’s coast and ocean statewide. The application period was extended to capture a larger applicant pool and closed in April 2024. EJ Advisory Board members were selected based on their demonstrated experience and qualifications in alignment with the EJ Advisory Board’s purpose stated above. The selection committee prioritized applicants with lived or professional experience in environmental justice communities, tribally-led entities/organizations, and tribal governments in the following regions:

North Coast, San Francisco Bay Area, Central Coast, Los Angeles, San Diego, or those with statewide perspectives.

Both tribal governments as well as tribally-led entities/organizations were encouraged to apply to the EJ Advisory Board, however, input received through their membership does not, and will not, replace formal government-to-government consultation with tribes on any applicable state policy or action.

## EJ Advisory Board Members

The inaugural EJ Advisory Board, announced in May 2024, includes seven (7) community leaders representing California’s diverse regions and communities. Members of the Board are:

- Frank Buncom IV (he/him) – San Diego
- Patricia J. Flores Yrarrázaval (she/they) – Los Angeles
- Sonya Hammons (she/they) – San Francisco Bay Area
- Hannah Lent (she/her) – Central Coast
- Carlos Moran (he/him/él) – Los Angeles
- Luis Neuner (he/him) – North Coast
- Mario Ordoñez (he/him) – San Diego

To learn more about members’ areas of expertise and backgrounds, visit the [EJ Advisory Board webpage](#).

## Contribution and Impact

The EJ Advisory Board contributes directly to the advancement of equitable coastal and ocean outcomes by centering the Board’s voices, insights, lived and professional experience with environmental justice communities and tribes. The Board’s recommendations help provide resilient, culturally relevant guidance that inform state policies and programs aimed at improving equitable outcomes for California communities. Its guidance also strengthens the state’s ability to evaluate and report progress on equity initiatives, reinforcing transparency and accountability across the state’s efforts to enhance access to and protection of coastal and ocean resources.

Since its establishment, the Board has advised on OPC statewide initiatives to better align and inform the state’s work of the needs and priorities of under-resourced communities. Through open exchange of knowledge and insights, Board members help provide unique perspectives to elevate the needs and perspectives of environmental justice and tribal communities, where appropriate, across state ocean and coastal programs, and to support efforts to strengthen partnerships with communities across the state.

## Progress to Date and Look Ahead

Since its inception in May 2024, the EJ Advisory Board has met three times (May, August, and November 2024) to make notable progress in establishing its foundational objectives and advancing equity considerations within state coast and ocean programs and equity initiatives. Topics to be addressed by the EJ Advisory Board, consistent with its stated purpose, include: elevating ocean and coastal needs and priorities of tribal and environmental communities; sharing perspectives regarding equity indicators and metrics to better measure the state’s progress in advancing equity and environmental justice outcomes; advising on improved equitable grantmaking processes; and sharing perspectives to help strengthen state partnerships with communities through inclusive outreach, participation, and meaningful engagement.

To date, the Board co-developed the EJ Advisory Board Charter ([Exhibit A](#)), formally solidifying the standards for its advisory role and structure as well as ensuring alignment on shared goals and defining shared principles to guide future Board activities.

The Board has contributed valuable insights into key state initiatives, offering guidance on incorporating community perspectives and equity considerations. This has included discussions centered on improving equitable grantmaking, preliminary feedback on a statewide Community Science Engagement Strategy and Human Dimensions Research Agenda for Marine Protected Area management to incorporate community perspectives effectively in the process, and advising on equity considerations, including opportunities and limitations to include equity-focused indicators, into [California’s Ocean and Coast Report Card](#), which assesses the health of coastal and ocean resources statewide. The Board has also engaged in early discussions on the OPC Equity Plan’s Biennial Assessment, which provides the opportunity to evaluate progress, reporting, and recommendations to refine needs and metrics to assess OPC and the state’s progress in meeting the goals of the Equity Plan.

Looking ahead to 2025, the Board’s priorities include continuing to advise on the development of the California Ocean and Coast Report Card, advancing the Equity Plan Biennial Assessment, and offering recommendations for OPC’s 2026-2030 Strategic Plan, concurrently during the public process, which includes public listening sessions that began in November 2024. The Board may be invited to present on its activities at future OPC Meetings, with the Board’s contributions and session outcomes featured quarterly in the OPC Executive Director’s Report.