



Media Release

State Water Board adopts resolution committing to advance racial equity in policy and practice

Acknowledges role of systemic racism in creating environmental and drinking water inequities

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SACRAMENTO – The State Water Resources Control Board today adopted a [resolution](#) affirming its commitment to advancing racial equity and acknowledging that its programs were established within a structural framework that perpetuates inequities based on race. In the resolution, the State Water Board pledges to express this commitment through institutionalizing racial equity in its policies, programs and service to communities while fostering greater workforce diversity, equity and inclusion within the agency.

The Board's action follows a deliberate process of consultation and introspection by the agency after the Board directed staff to advance racial equity as an agency priority at its Aug. 18, 2020 meeting. While the State Water Boards' racial equity and environmental justice work began prior to 2020, the national reckoning on racial justice last year underscored the urgency of formally addressing racial inequity at the institutional level.

Staff hosted listening sessions for employees and the general public to provide input on the resolution for the Board's consideration. The sessions focused on the State Water Boards' engagement with communities of color and racial equity in the workplace. Feedback from those sessions indicated that communities of color feel excluded from decision making processes by the State Water Board on issues that affect them, and that employees perceive a lack of cultural competence and opportunity within the State Water Boards' workforce to increase diversity. Participants also expressed the need for an acknowledgment of existing racial inequities and environmental injustices.

“Systemic racism is part of the very structures we work within and can only be addressed through organized and persistent efforts at the institutional level,” said E. Joaquin Esquivel, Chair of the State Water Board. “The resolution adopted today is a major step by the Board toward addressing racism and advancing racial equity institutionally, and this effort must begin with a recognition of the inequities that exist and why.”

The resolution directs staff to develop a Racial Equity Action Plan that articulates the agency’s vision and includes goals, objectives and metrics. The plan must include specific actions the Board will take to address systems that perpetuate racial inequities while establishing new, resilient systems. Staff will seek out and consider input from stakeholders to inform the action plan.

In the resolution, the Board explicitly recognizes white supremacy as an institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of nations and people of color by white people for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege. Among several other points, it acknowledges that the impacts of this system, including forced relocation and enslavement, on Black, Indigenous and people of color gave rise to the environmental inequities these communities experience today. Per [CalEPA’s analysis](#), 90% of the most-polluted neighborhoods in California are in these communities, which are also disproportionately burdened by contaminated drinking water sources. Race continues to be the strongest predictor of access to water, sanitation and government services overall.

The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.