



CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION of SANITATION AGENCIES

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September 16, 2014

Sent via Electronic Mail to commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov



Felicia Marcus, Chair, and Members State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
c/o Ms. Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board

Subject: CASA Comment Letter – FY 2014-15 Water Quality Fees

Dear Chair Marcus and Board Members,

The California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed Water Quality Fees for Fiscal Year 2014-15 (hereafter “fees”). CASA is a statewide association representing more than 100 municipalities, special districts, and joint powers agencies that provide wastewater collection, treatment, clean energy and water recycling services to millions of Californians. CASA’s members are governed by Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) or are required to obtain National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, and thus are directly impacted by the proposed fees.

Incorporation of Monitoring Surcharge Into Base Fee Calculations

For wastewater treatment agencies, the most significant change in the proposed 2014-15 fees is the incorporation of what was formerly a surcharge for ambient monitoring programs into the base fee calculations for those regulated entities covered by a WDR or NPDES permit. Currently, NPDES permit holders pay a separate surcharge of 21% annually to support the Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP), while entities subject to WDRs pay a 9.5% surcharge to the Groundwater Ambient Monitoring and Assessment (GAMA) program. The revised fee regulations roll these surcharges into the base fee assessment and eliminate the specific references to the ambient monitoring programs (See section 2200, Regulations at p. 1.).

While we understand the rationale behind incorporating the surcharges into the base fee calculations, CASA would like to ensure that there remains an element of transparency in the amounts being charged for these programs going forward. Under the revised method of calculating the ambient monitoring fees, it will be unclear whether the “surcharge” portion of the fee is increasing on a year to year basis, or whether it is only funding for other NPDES and WDR program elements are fluctuating.



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In 2003 when the Legislature shifted the entirety of the fee to the regulated community, CASA requested that the State Water Board refrain from simply adding the ambient monitoring costs to the base fee calculations. Instead, we asked that they be expressed as a separate surcharge, in part to provide some transparency for the programs and ensure that they were designed cost-effectively. While incorporating the surcharges into the base fees may be less complicated from an accounting perspective, CASA is concerned that cost increases in these programs may not be visible to the regulated community. Thus, we suggest that State Water Board staff include a statement in either the regulations or the staff report each year indicating the portion of the fee attributable to costs for ambient monitoring programs. If increases above the current percentages (9.5% and 21% respectively) are proposed, the rationale and basis for the proposed increase should be outlined.

Ongoing Resource Alignment Initiative

CASA understands that the WDR fee increases are in response to the state budget adopted by the Legislature, but now more than ever it is imperative the State Water Board continue to work with stakeholders, staff, and the Regional Boards to find ways to reduce the costs of compliance while maintaining water quality protections. We appreciate the State Water Board's continuing work on the resource alignment initiative, and look forward to discussing the responses to the POTW proposals and related endeavors at future meetings.

Sincerely,

Adam D. Link
CASA Director of Government Affairs