

**REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN DIEGO REGION**

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
APRIL 8, 2026**

ITEM 7

SUBJECT

NPDES Permit Amendment: Amendment of Waste Discharge Requirements for the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) Discharge to the Pacific Ocean Through the South Bay Ocean Outfall (Tentative Order No. R9-2026-0005).
(Riley Nolan)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Adopt Tentative Order No. R9-2026-0005.

KEY ISSUES

On May 20, 2025, USIBWC announced a planned accelerated incremental expansion of the SBIWTP from 25 million gallons per day (MGD) to 35 MGD, with a target start date of August 28, 2025. USIBWC proposed to treat up to 35 MGD of influent wastewater through advanced primary treatment followed by 25 MGD of secondary treatment using existing activated sludge processes. USIBWC proposed to blend up to 10 MGD of advanced primary effluent with 25 MGD of secondary effluent prior to discharge to the Pacific Ocean via the South Bay Land Outfall (SBLO) and South Bay Ocean Outfall (SBOO).

USIBWC's discharge from the SBIWTP is regulated by Order No. R9-2021-0001, as amended by Order No. R9-2023-0009, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit No. CA0108928, *Waste Discharge Requirements for the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant Discharge to the Pacific Ocean Through the South Bay Ocean Outfall* (NPDES Permit). The NPDES Permit establishes waste discharge requirements for the discharge of secondary-treated wastewater from the SBIWTP, including a maximum monthly average permitted effluent flow limitation of 25 MGD.

On August 27, 2025, the San Diego Water Board adopted Cease and Desist Order No. R9-2025-0139 (2025 CDO), which found that the 10-MGD expansion threatened to violate the NPDES Permit. The 2025 CDO established interim effluent limitations for USIBWC's 35 MGD of blended advanced primary- and secondary-treated effluent. The 2025 CDO also established remedial and preventative actions for USIBWC to implement, and required the submittal of documents related to the design, operation, and maintenance under the accelerated incremental expansion. The 2025 CDO expires

on June 30, 2026, at which point USIBWC is required to comply with the effluent limitations in its NPDES Permit.

USIBWC's August 28, 2025, target to treat up to 10 MGD of additional flow did not allow sufficient time for the San Diego Water Board to amend its NPDES Permit. However, San Diego Water Board staff aimed to bring a tentative NPDES Permit amendment to the San Diego Water Board prior to its expiration date (June 30, 2026) to account for the expansion from 25 MGD to 35 MGD.

USIBWC is in the process of further expanding the SBIWTP to achieve 50 MGD of full secondary treatment by December 2027. As such, USIBWC does not expect to regain compliance with its permitted flow rate of 25 MGD, or the corresponding mass emission rate effluent limitations. If adopted, the Tentative Order would amend the NPDES Permit to authorize USIBWC's 10-MGD expansion and establish new effluent limitations for USIBWC's 35 MGD of blended advanced primary- and secondary-treated effluent. Proposed changes in the Tentative Order include: 1) revised effluent limitations, performance goals, and influent action levels; 2) a requirement for USIBWC to submit a Treatment Optimization Report to the San Diego Water Board; 3) updates to Attachment F (Fact Sheet) to reflect USIBWC's 10-MGD expansion, updated facility contact information, and changes to the description of Tijuana's sewage collection system; 4) minor updates to Attachment A (Abbreviations and Definitions) and Attachment C (Flow Schematics); and 5) changes to Attachment E (Monitoring and Reporting Program) to require weekly monitoring of fecal coliform and *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) at Dairy Mart Bridge and to clarify that monitoring requirements tied to the NPDES Permit term must continue in the event of the NPDES Permit's expiration and administrative extension.

The NPDES Permit will expire on June 30, 2026, at which point the terms and conditions of the NPDES Permit will be administratively extended pending reissuance of the permit. The San Diego Water Board will consider authorization of USIBWC's larger expansion of the SBIWTP to 50 MGD upon reissuance of the NPDES Permit.

COMPLIANCE RECORD

On May 12, 2021, the San Diego Water Board adopted Order No. R9-2021-0001, which prescribed waste discharge requirements for the SBIWTP. Since the San Diego Water Board had determined, based on effluent data, that the SBIWTP discharge threatened to violate effluent limitations in Order No. R9-2021-0001, the San Diego Water Board also issued Cease and Desist Order No. R9-2021-0107 (2021 CDO) on the same day. The 2021 CDO established a time schedule for USIBWC to complete necessary maintenance and repairs, and other deliverables to achieve compliance with effluent limitations in its NPDES Permit.

In December 2023, the San Diego Water Board adopted a time schedule order (TSO), Order No, R9-2023-0189. The TSO established a revised time schedule for USIBWC to complete necessary maintenance and repairs to achieve compliance with effluent limitations in the NPDES Permit by August 15, 2024.

After considerable prioritization of and investment in rehabilitation of the SBIWTP, USIBWC attained compliance with all effluent limitations in November 2024. From November 2024 to August 2025, USIBWC reported two effluent violations: 1) settleable solids instantaneous maximum of 5 milliliters per liter (ml/L) exceeded effluent limitation of 3 ml/L in February 2025 and 2) 30-day average total suspended solids (TSS) percent removal of 84.09% did not meet minimum required removal of 85% in April 2025.

On August 27, 2025, the San Diego Water Board adopted the 2025 CDO in response to USIBWC's planned 10-MGD expansion of the SBIWTP. As of March 2026, USIBWC has complied with all elements of the 2025 CDO.

PRACTICAL VISION

Addressing water quality impairments from transboundary flows is one of the San Diego Water Board's highest priorities according to its Key Beneficial Uses and Key Areas approach, adopted in Chapter 1 of its Practical Vision¹. The lower Tijuana River, Tijuana River Estuary, and the Region's near shore coastal waters fall under the highest-ranking priority for water bodies with beneficial uses associated with recreation, habitat and ecosystems, and fish and shellfish consumption.

Chapter 4 of the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision cites pollution in the Tijuana River Valley and surrounding beaches as a significant environmental justice issue for the Region. Transboundary pollution in the San Diego-Tijuana region disproportionately impacts disadvantaged and underserved communities on both sides of the border.

Accordingly, the treatment of an additional 10 MGD of wastewater from Tijuana's municipal collection system, and the corresponding reduction in dry-weather transboundary flows, is consistent with the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision.

DISCUSSION

Limitations within Tijuana's collection and conveyance system result in discharges of wastewater to the concrete-lined main channel of the Tijuana River in Mexico. This frequently results in polluted transboundary flows through the main channel of the Tijuana River that reach the Tijuana River Valley, Tijuana River Estuary, and the Pacific Ocean shoreline adjacent to the river mouth.

¹ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water_issues/programs/practical_vision/

Transboundary flows of untreated domestic and industrial wastewater originating in Tijuana result in significant and prolonged water quality impairments in the lower Tijuana River, Tijuana River Estuary, and San Diego's near-shore coastal waters. Poor water quality conditions stemming from transboundary flows result in prolonged beach closures in southern San Diego County and degraded air quality, particularly in the communities of Imperial Beach, Nestor, and San Ysidro, with disadvantaged communities bearing the brunt of the pollution. Accordingly, controlling transboundary flows from Mexico and improving border water quality is one of the San Diego Water Board's highest priorities.

Authorizing USIBWC to treat of an additional 10 MGD from the City of Tijuana's municipal wastewater collection system will allow authorities in Mexico to capture additional dry weather flows from the main channel of the Tijuana River, reducing transboundary flows into the United States.

Tentative Order No. R9-2026-0005 and a version of the NPDES Permit including the original proposed changes were made available for a 30-day public review and comment period from January 14, 2026, to February 13, 2026. The San Diego Water Board received comment letters from the City of Imperial Beach, San Diego Coastkeeper, San Diego Unified Port District, and Surfrider Foundation. The San Diego Water Board received no opposing comments. Several comments requested that the NPDES Permit be changed to include requirements to support broader border water quality efforts in the Tijuana River Valley, but those were deemed to be outside of the scope of the NPDES Permit amendment's focus. In response to public comments from the City of Imperial Beach and Surfrider Foundation, San Diego Water Board staff propose elevating the required frequency for bacteria monitoring at Dairy Mart Bridge from quarterly to weekly. USIBWC has already committed to weekly bacteria monitoring in its work plan for the Tijuana River Valley Monitoring Program. A summary of all written comments, and San Diego Water Board responses is available in Supporting Document 3.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The San Diego Water Board included this item in its notice and agenda for the April 8, 2026, meeting.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. Tentative Order No. R9-2026-0005
2. Attachment 1 to Tentative Order No. R9-2026-0005
3. Response to Comments on Tentative Order No. R9-2026-0005
4. City of Imperial Beach Comment Letter*
5. San Diego Coastkeeper Comment Letter*
6. San Diego Unified Port District Comment Letter*

7. Surfrider Foundation Comment Letter*

*For a copy of this document, please email a request to our records administrator at rb9_records@waterboards.ca.gov.