



Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program  
Bioaccumulation Monitoring Program  
Realignment Plan  
Executive Summary

January 2021

## Introduction

The preservation, enhancement, and restoration of California's water resources is vital to the health and well-being of all Californians, Native American Tribes, the economy, and natural lands for present and future generations. The original mission of the State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Water Boards) [Bioaccumulation Monitoring Program](#) (Program) was to provide statewide monitoring data and information that could be used to:

- assess and contribute to the protection and restoration of fishing and aquatic life beneficial uses that are impacted by the bioaccumulation of pollutants in California's waterbodies, and
- assess the human health risks associated with the consumption of contaminated fish and shellfish in California's freshwater and coastal ecosystems, and use that information to support the development of advisories that would inform consumers of significant health risks associated with the consumption of particular species.

The Program has realized several successes, such as forming the [Bioaccumulation Oversight Group \(BOG\)](#) and establishing comprehensive, statewide bioaccumulation monitoring methodologies and assessments that began to answer the question: "Is it safe to eat fish and shellfish from our waters?" since its inception in 2006. However, BOG members and Program staff recognize that the original Program plans were ambitious given the limited resources but addressing two key issues could better achieve the original mission.

- 1) The connections, collaboration, and beneficial symbiotic relationships among the Program and other Water Boards Divisions, Regions, and programs are not fully realized.
- 2) Significant data and information gaps remain regarding the question: "Is it safe to eat fish and shellfish from our waters?", especially for waterbodies or species that are important for subsistence by traditionally underrepresented communities, as well as Tribal tradition, culture, and subsistence.

The Program realignment will address these issues and improve the coordination, communication, and community engagement of the Program and the BOG so that the resulting data will:

- 1) align and integrate with other Water Board programs to better assess and contribute to the protection and restoration of aquatic life and fishing beneficial uses impacted by bioaccumulative pollutants, and
- 2) provide a better basis for public health advisories for fish consumption for communities that rely on fishing for subsistence, sustenance, cultural, and Tribal purposes.

## Realignment Implementation

Successful implementation of the Program realignment requires intentional actions that balance maintaining core aspects of the current statewide and regional program efforts, implementing realignment efforts, and the reality of limited Program and implementation resources. Therefore, the realignment will be conducted in a phased approach and will leverage complementary endeavors such as regional sampling plans, the distribution of [Assembly Bill No. 762](#) funding to County health officials for posting health advisories, and regional beneficial use designation efforts.

The implementation of this realignment will be led by a Water Board Committee, composed of:

- Bioaccumulation Monitoring Program staff;
- Regional Board SWAMP Coordinators;
- Regional/Divisional Tribal Coordinators;
- other Regional Board staff, managers, and/or executives who will be intimately involved in the pilot realignment process; and
- staff, managers, and/or executives from other State Board divisions or programs may also be included in the Water Board Committee, as appropriate.

The Water Board Committee will conduct most of the work related to coordinating the realignment implementation process, including recruiting and engaging with regional Community Advisory Committees (CACs) as well as providing updates on the realignment implementation progress or soliciting recommendations from the BOG, as needed.

The systematic incorporation and inclusion of community perspectives will be achieved through the development of region-specific CACs, to be composed of representatives from:

- Tribes;
- community-based organizations;
- organizations involved in protecting water quality;
- organizations involved in habitat restoration (due to the possible influence on bioaccumulation of mercury and possibly other pollutants);
- organizations involved in resource (i.e., water and fisheries) management;
- organizations involved in protecting human health; and
- organizations involved in communicating information on health risks to affected communities.

The CACs will act as a hub for documenting the community needs of the regions, coordinating involvement, engagement, and feedback with the Program. A specific goal of the CACs will be to promote inclusion and equity by engaging traditionally underrepresented communities and Tribes and addressing information needs relating to fish and shellfish consumption by these groups.

### **Phase I: October – December 2020**

Program staff will work with regional programs to determine which region will be selected as the first pilot region and begin internal coordination and preparation for Phase II. See Table 2 in the realignment plan for specific tasks to be completed during Phase I.

### **Phase II: January 2021 – December 2023**

The Water Board Committee will recruit and coordinate with the first CAC, which will oversee the regional realignment pilot. See Table 3 in the realignment plan for specific tasks to be completed during Phase II.

### **Phase III\*: January 2024 – TBD**

The Water Board Committee will debrief on Phase II (to include a compilation of lessons learned from the previous phases), and map out how the long-term realignment of the entire Program, in all regions, can be achieved. This will result in an updated long-term Program realignment implementation plan.