

**INFORMATIONAL HEARING OF THE SENATE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY  
COMMITTEE**

**BOB WIECKOWSKI, CHAIR**

Friday, May 29, 2015, 10:00 a.m.  
Oakland, CA

**Remarks of Jack Liebster**

(Currently Planning Manager, Marin County Community Development Agency)

**Committee Staff request: We would like for you to present for 7-10 minutes to give an overview of adaptation and resiliency efforts from the county perspective in Marin, incorporating the following points generally, as appropriate:**

- 1. The main climate change impacts of concern for the county and how these potentially vary between sea- and bay-side communities;**

Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am Jack Liebster, Planning Manager for Marin County, though today I am relaying my personal observations on the questions posed, which do not necessarily reflect the still-developing official views of Marin County.

Marin County is second most at risk in the Bay Area for projected impacts from sea level rise (SLR), flooding and storms (Pacific Institute 2012). While Marin has only 4% of the Bay Area's population, it makes up 18% of the region's population at risk from storm, flood, and sea level rise, with potential losses of \$8.5 billion worth of buildings and contents on the bay shoreline and \$220 million along the ocean coast (Pacific Institute, 2012, 2009). Projected SLR also threatens serious impact to Marin's wetlands, creeks, beaches, other natural resources, and approximately 11 square miles of adjacent lands.

The nature of the danger is different between the Bayside and the Coastside. Human development is more intense along the Bay shoreline, and thus a greater amount is

potentially exposed. But the Bayside is more sheltered than the open coast, which is subject to stronger, higher waves, especially if, as many scientists expect, storms become more powerful in the future while the surface of the sea continues to rise.

The topography and geology of the coast also pose distinct risks- many homes in the Stinson Beach area are literally built on sand, while others are on bluffs that could collapse as a result of more rapid erosion at their base could under future conditions.

Our fundamental principle in responding to SLR can be summarized in the old Scout motto: “Be prepared.” In order to do that, we are carefully assessing the varying conditions that exist along our shores and tailoring our response to the specific needs of each situation.

## **2. An overview of the county’s planning and coordinating efforts regarding adapting to the impacts of climate change, including how the county has worked across cities and departments to coordinate strategies;**

In asking about the planning and coordination needed between cities and the county, and in turn the numerous regional, state and federal agencies currently or soon to be involved in sea level rise, I believe the Committee has put its finger on potentially the most intractable aspect of this issue – that is **Governance**: how we engage and adapt the multiple layers of overlapping jurisdictions in a coordinated, coherent, effective and efficient arrangement capable of responding to and managing this growing problem over the long term. While we may not be able to blow up boxes, tear down silos, eliminate turf boundaries that hinder joint action, we must create working relationships that can produce the bottom line results that doing all those things would allow.

Here’s how Marin is just beginning to do this. Marin County and its 11 cities share alternating parts of our Bay shoreline in a hopscotch fashion. The Bay simply has no respect for these boundaries, and in some cases we need to act as if they were not there.

Fortunately, many local elected officials and their staffs recognize this need. To lubricate that machinery, the County Board of Supervisors has authorized a third of

a million dollars to begin a Countywide SLR Vulnerability Assessment that will actively engage each of the Cities in the process at multiple levels. We hope the County's investment will soon be augmented by an additional quarter of a million dollars through a Climate Ready grant. The precise details of the project's collaborative structure are still being worked out, because we all recognize it is more important to get this **right** than to get **it in a hurry**.

Generally it will probably look something like this:

**A Policy group** consisting of 2 County Supervisors and one City Council member from **each** participating City will take up the mandate to:

1. Work with other members of the group to provide overall direction to the Vulnerability Assessment process.
2. Communicate progress to their own Councils/Board and constituents;
3. Convey information, ideas, and concerns from their home town constituents into the collaborative process.

**A Technical Group** would consist of one key staff member from each City to act as a primary point of contact, draw upon specific expertise within local agency staff to advise project staff and review project products, and directly communicate, educate and engage their own jurisdiction's officials, staff and community in all aspects of the project.

It is expected **key staff from special districts** particularly affected by Sea Level Rise will participate on the Technical Group.

**An Executive or Steering Group** will be drawn from the other two groups to respond to the general operational needs of the project staff .

At some point, these arrangements may be formalized through vehicles of Memoranda of Agreement or a Joint Powers Authority, but at this point we want to avoid any barriers to participation, and rely instead on informal, collegial cooperation. In this we are emulating the highly successful Marin Clean Energy program, which started its program in exactly this manner. This is one way we've applied lessons learned.

I would like to very briefly mention our public outreach, education and involvement program. It is driven by a couple of principles derived from our year of work on the coast. While we offer an extensive schedule of our own public workshops and meetings, we do not rely on people coming to us, rather we go to them where they already are, such as homeowner's and service group meetings, business breakfasts and established community functions. We use civic engagement over the internet so they can participate from home.

We also target involvement of communities of color and the economically disadvantaged, in part because these occupy locations that are among the first to feel significant SLR impacts.

**3. How the county coordinates with other counties, regional agencies, organizations, etc. to identify vulnerabilities and coordinate adaptation strategies, highlighting examples from relevant projects where helpful;**

We are keenly aware of, and working hard to tap into, the opportunities afforded by the growing community of other local governments, regional, state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations involved in SLR planning. C-SMART, our coastside SLR program, now about a year old, would not been able to go forward as early as it did, had we not taken entrepreneurial, opportunistic initiatives to partner with the federal USGS and Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary and the non-profit Point Blue Conservation Science (formerly Point Reyes Bird Observatory) to integrate their sophisticated SLR modelling – which we otherwise never could have afforded - into the county planning process.

We are so committed to this kind of cooperative engagement that it is built into our name: C-SMART stands for “**Collaboration:** Sea-level Marin Adaptation Response Team”.

We dedicated a specific part of our work program to gathering the most useful information from other organizations and sharing our work with them. Especially when the public has paid for research and studies, my motto is “Don't evade your eyes, plagiarize,” something I plagiarized from old Tom Lehrer.

We have cooperated in establishing the California Adaptation Network, a list-serve where state SLR grantees can communicate about specific work we are engaged in. But we really need to do more than that. There are a burgeoning number of organizations and web portals offering reams of SLR information.. But volume does not translate to value in this case, and from the point of view of a poor practitioner at the local level, this proliferation of portals appears so repetitive and overwhelming that it just leaves me perplexed and lost.

## **2. Successes and challenges to implementing climate adaptation projects, highlighting relevant projects and community engagement work.**

I was asked to comment about successes and challenges. I think the most important success to date for us is that we are actually beginning the work. A colleague says that SLR is like being run over by a turtle – it not immediate and dramatic. Keeping with the amphibian analogy, recall the old story about how to cook a frog. If you drop it in boiling water, it will just hop out. But if you put in in a pot of water and gradually increase the heat, it will just stay there until it's boiled. We could have been that frog, but we're not, because we are wisely starting to work before the crisis occurs.

My time is short, but I'd like to leave you with two ideas.

I haven't yet found anything that really fits the bill of a **curated** source of existing and developing information that specifically applies to the work we are doing and would help avoid incessantly reinventing the wheel. Someplace you could call and ask something like “*what information is there on restoring dunes as a “green” adaptation measure in California?*”

***Content** curation is the process of collecting, organizing and displaying information relevant to a particular topic or area of interest. Services or people that implement **content** curation are called **curators**. Curation services can be used by businesses as well as end users.*

It could even include a YELP-like feature so practitioners could rate the value of the content. There is one key requirement for those who would carry out this mission –they must be solely dedicated to serving the people in the field, and have

no desire to aggrandize their own agency or push their own agenda or point of view.

My second modest proposal is to put some proof in the pudding of adaptation. I make no claim to knowing much about the tech world – my smart phone is clearly much smarter than me- but I have heard about the concept of prototyping.

Wikipedia defines it thus:

*A **prototype** is an early sample, model, or release of a product built to test a concept or process or to act as a thing to be replicated or learned from.*

**Let's do some of that!** When I was with the Coastal Conservancy, one of my colleagues carried out a small project in the Tijuana River National Estuarine Reserve. It had five plots side by side, each using a different method of wetland restoration to see which would be most successful. The results were hugely valuable and quickly applicable. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a working prototype proving a concept and providing design details is worth millions.

Take for example the idea of a Horizontal Levee. I love this idea- it looks like a win-win. But most likely it could not be built under current regional state and federal regulations. Our project is proposing to take that picture, and do initial engineering design to develop cost and feasibility information for this potential break-through idea.

We need support at the highest Regional, State and Federal levels to transcend the routine red-tape limiting innovation. We need changes that support prototyping and on-the-ground experimentation so that in even a limited number of appropriate situations, with funding provided for needed mitigation, the regulatory agencies could be encouraged, or legislated if necessary, to allow for a few such prototypes to be pursued to determine if they can live up to their promise. This could go a long way to opening up imagination and innovation for new ways to respond to Sea Level Rise

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue. All of us in Marin wish you the best on your important work.