

Director AB 1234 Report
March 5, 2024

Director name: Gary Martin

Meetings attended:

- 1) 2/21/24 Urban Water Institute Board of Directors meeting in Palm Springs, CA
 - 2) 2/21/24 – 2/23/24 Urban Water Institute Spring 2024 Water Conference in Palm Springs, CA
- SCV Water Board Meeting to be presented at: March 5, 2024

February 21, 2024

I attended the Urban Water Institute Board of Directors meeting at the Palm Springs Hilton. The agenda was as follows, including board decisions and other points of interest:

1. Call the meeting to order and welcome. Board chair Andree Lee called the meeting to order, welcomed members, declared a quorum present, and called for a moment of silence in memory of John Thornton, long time UWI treasurer. A formal recognition of John's contributions to the UWI will be made at the August conference in San Diego.
2. The minutes from the August board meeting were approved.
3. Three new board members were introduced and approved. The new members were Steve Erie, UC San Diego; Isabel Rios, Discovery Cube; and Marilyn Thomas, East Orange County Water District.
4. Board Chair / Executive Director's Report – Andree Lee and Ane Deister. Discussion items were as follows:

December Strategic Planning Workshop in San Diego:

- UWI goals are appropriate and well aligned; wording slightly changed to be in an active voice.
 - Conferences need better reach and influence. There is a desire to engage new participants, like city / county officials and academic community.
 - There is agreement on UWI's core functions of education, facilitation of water policy dialogue and networking, and collaboration.
 - We need to better define our value proposition for membership.
 - There is general agreement that the primary focus of UWI is education, but with different perspectives on what education is and what education means and encompasses.
 - The board approved amended goals.
5. Treasurer's Report – Lisa Ohlund. The 2024 budget was approved. Total income \$387k, total expenses \$347k, net income \$41k.
 6. Planning Chair's Report – Darcy Burke. The August conference will be at the Paradise Point Resort. This was approved by the board, based on staff recommendation after receiving proposals from a number of hotels.
 7. Membership Chair's Report – Greg Quist on behalf of Shivaji Deshmukh.
 8. Policy Chair's Report – Fernando Paludi.
 9. Board Discussion Items – Adree Lee. John Thornton's passing recognition will be at the August conference. There was open discussion on future conferences topics.
 10. Roundtable discussion of any / all topics.
 11. Upcoming dates: August 21 – 23 Annual Conference in San Diego.
 12. Adjournment.

February 21 – 23, 2024 UWI Spring Water Conference in Palm Springs:

I attended the 2024 UWI Spring Water Conference at the Palm Springs Hilton. A brief session description and points of interest are as follows:

February 21:

1:00 PM – welcome to the conference by Andree Lee, UWI Board Chair. Welcome to Palm Springs by the Mayor of Palm Springs.

1:30 PM – System Changes; Our Legal System – Water in Courts; Regulations – PFAS – Risk vs Regulatory Risk.

Ronald B. Robie, Associate Justice, Court of Appeal, Third Appellate District gave a fascinating talk on his many years of experience in California water, especially his involvement in ruling on key water issues facing California. Justice Robie said we're still fighting (legally) the same issues we fought about 100 years ago. When the State Board announces new guidelines and operating procedures for development projects, there are those that benefit and those that don't. Then comes litigation.

Dr. Bruce Macler, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (retired) discussed Regulations – PFAS – Risk vs. Regulatory Risk:

- The Safe Water Drinking Act is unique in the world.
- Real Risk is not the same as Regulatory Risk. Regulatory Risk is a defined calculation used to set benchmarks / regulations. Real Risks are effects that a medical doctor can see. Drinking water regulations set risks below medical detection.
- Are we better off with the SDWA? The answer breaks down into the good, bad and ugly. It's good that we control microbial pathogens and we eliminate drinking water disease outbreaks. It's bad that stringent requirements are costly but still we have public distrust. The ugly is that we're chasing marginal risks.
- Discussed arsenic MCL, lead restrictions, DW lead and copper rules, and PFAS health concerns.
- PFAS materials are so common that we all have varying amounts in our blood.
- PFAS toxicity studies show many biological problems, but connection to human exposure is uncertain.
- It is questionable if PFAS regulations will make a health difference.
- US DW standards are very stringent, and DW risks are well below health significance

3:15 PM - Loaves and Fishes

Three presentations made:

- The importance of CA Agriculture, Karen Ross, Secretary of the CA Department of Food & Agriculture.
- Groundwater Over-Drafting in the San Joaquin Valley, Chris White, Central California Irrigation District.
- Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley, Charles Gardener, Hallmark Group, SJV Water Blueprint.

These presentations addressed the huge importance of California agriculture and the water supply challenges in the central valley and potential solutions being worked to address the over-drafting problem.

February 22:

8:15 AM – Science Matters – Global Solutions for Climate Change, Dr. David Sedlak UC Berkeley; Affordability of Water, Dr. Mehdi Nemati UC Riverside.

Dr. David Sedlak:

- Author of book "Water for All"

- Presented patterns of population growth, water use and 10 other industrial categories between 1950 and 2010.
- Global weather patterns.
- Providing water for the wealthy, for the many, for the poor, for health, for food, and for ecosystems.
- The water reuse revolution; full advanced treatment, physical and chemical treatment, managed aquifer recharge.
- Net zero water and projects underway.
- Costs: techno-economic analysis.
- Projects in wealthy cities.
- Water for food.
- The first green revolution.
- Advanced water technology in agriculture.
- Take aways: water challenges facing wealthy city dwellers on of 6 global water crises; no single solution, experience gained can be applied in new locations, all of us are integral to Water for All.

Dr. Mehdi Nemati:

- California water affordability as a measure of % of income spent on water; EPA thresholds 2% for water and 4.5% for water and wastewater.
- Discretionary income is falling and costs for water are rising.
- 17% of households pay more than 4.5% of income for water and wastewater services.
- Why costs are rising: aging infrastructure, water quality challenges, climate impacts.
- Investigations in water affordability in California.
- Case studies in MWD service areas, Eastern MWD and Elsinore Valley MWD.
- Takeaways: Households above the EPA 4.5% threshold live in lower median income areas, in higher % of renter-occupied areas with lower median gross rent, but higher median rent as % of income.

10:00 AM – Water Communications – Value of Water, Greg Kail, AWWA; Communicating Tough Messages, Dr. Renee Fraser, Fraser Communications; Neighborhood Communications, Marice DePasquale, Mesa Water District.

Dr. Renee Fraser – Building Brand Trust & Value Perceptions in Today’s World.

- Presentation addressed brand trust and perception; the importance of this and customer actions when brand trust is high, and how customers act when trust and experiences are low and the messages they relay to friends.
- Dr. Fraser also addressed strategies for shifting perceptions and for creating perceived brand value and trust.
- What can elected office holders do? – be authentic, influence responsibly, walk the talk, be transparent, and talk to the community.

Greg Kail – Value of Water.

- Mr. Kail made a presentation on the history and legacy of the American Water Works Association (AWWA); “The confidence must be deserved before public relations work can be successful.”
- Value of water campaign; imagine a day without water, build public trust in water service.

February 22

1:30 PM – Facing the Unknown – AI in Communications Justin Wallin, Wallin Opinion Research; On-The-Ground Demonstration, Jason Assouline, Water Re-use Association & Carollo Engineers; Workforce Challenges, Anona Dutton, EKI Environment & Water.

Justin Wallin – AI in Communications

- AI doesn't replace humans
- AI has the potential to improve all aspects of communications.
- AI wants to make you happy, does not want to find the truth.
- AI in customer service – 68% feel that humans understand their needs better than AI.
- 55% feel that customer service is driven by humans.

Jason Assouline – On the Ground AI Demonstration.

- Why machine learning (ML) and AI are important to water utilities.
- Mass amounts of data is being generated.
- Technology advancements still require human interaction.
- Having a string of utility partners is important.
- Worked with project at Las Virgenes for trial projects.

Anona Dutton – Workforce Challenges, Needed AI Skills and Talents

- Are you ready for it?
- Governor Newsom signed an Executive Order to prepare California for the progress of AI.
- Will AI replace the workforce?
- AI will re-shape for more jobs than it replaces.
- Main challenges in water industry – workforce leaving for retirement, workforce development,
- Internal staff skills.
- Barriers for adopting AI – lack of personnel skills.
- Workforce hiring and retention challenges.
- Where to get started?
- EKI's approach – accountability and responsibility, human oversight, ethics and integrity, data security / privacy.

3:15 PM – Size, Location Matters – California Small Water Systems, Dan Demoss, California Rural Water Association; Smaller Agency Challenges, David Youngblood, East Orange County WD; State Water Project Dependent Agencies' Challenges, Christiana Daisy, Inland Empire Utilities Agency.

Dan Demoss – California Small Water Systems.

- Regulatory compliance.
- Financial viability.
- O&M related issues.

Christiana Daisy – SWP Dependent Agencies' Challenges.

- Adapt to changing conditions.
- Increase local reliability and resiliency.
- Meet current and pending regulations on recycled water use and environmental flows.
- Need to develop portfolio to address uncertainties.
- Evaluate existing infrastructure, including spreading basins.
- Discussed Chino Basin programs.

February 23

8:15 AM – Jeff Kightlinger Unplugged, Lisa Ohlund Moderator.

Jeff Kightlinger, Keynote Speaker, Former General Manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

Mr. Kightlinger sat down for a 45-minute interview with Lisa Ohlund, IWI Treasurer, Ohlund Management & Technical Services. Points of interest are as follows:

- Mr. Kightlinger discussed his 15 years as GM for MWD, including accomplishments, priorities and challenges.
- Major accomplishments including completion of the Diamond Valley Lake reservoir, which provides a storage capacity of 800,000 acre-feet.
- Key takeaway was the importance of the State Water Project (SWP) and the critical need to modernize the SWP by completing the Delta Conveyance Project.
- Mr. Kightlinger stressed the importance of an “all of the above” approach to water supply for Southern California, including maximizing the use of recycled water.

I found the conference to be informative and beneficial. I appreciate the opportunity to attend.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Wednesday, February 21, 2024



TIME	ACTIVITIES
12:00 - 1:00PM	REGISTRATION, NETWORKING & EXHIBITS <i>HORIZON FOYER</i>
1:00 - 1:15PM	WELCOME TO THE CONFERENCE Andree Lee, UWI Board Chair, EKI Water & Environment
1:15-1:30PM	WELCOME TO PALM SPRINGS Jeffrey Bernstein, Mayor of Palm Springs
1:30 - 2:45PM 	SYSTEM CHANGES Our Legal System - Water in the Courts Justice Ronald Robie, California Court of Appeal, 3rd Appellate Dist. Introduction by Greg Newmark, Meyers Nave Riback Silver & Wilson Regulations – PFAS – Risk vs. Regulatory Risk Conversation with Dr. Bruce Macler, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Retired) & Darcy M. Burke, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District, US EPA Local Government Advisory Committee 15 minute audience Q&A
2:45 - 3:15PM	30 MINUTE BREAK: MEET THE SPEAKERS, Q&A
3:15 - 4:45PM 	LOAVES & FISHES The Importance of CA Agriculture, Panel Moderator Karen Ross, Secretary of the CA Dept. of Food & Agriculture Groundwater Overdrafting in the San Joaquin Valley Chris White, Central California Irrigation District Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley Charles Gardner, Hallmark Group; SJV Water Blueprint 15 minute audience Q&A
4:45 - 5:15PM	30 MINUTE BREAK: MEET THE SPEAKERS, Q&A
5:30 -6:30PM	WELCOME RECEPTION CELEBRATING OUR SPONSORS <i>POOLSIDE</i>

Thursday, February 22, 2024



TIME	ACTIVITIES
7:45 - 8:15AM	REGISTRATION, NETWORKING & BUFFET BREAKFAST <i>HORIZON FOYER</i>
8:15 - 9:30AM 	SCIENCE MATTERS Panel Moderator David Drake, ACWA/JPIA; Rincon del Diabló Municipal Water District Global Solutions for Climate Change Dr. David Sedlak, University of California, Berkeley Affordability of Water Dr. Mehdi Nemati, University of California, Riverside 15 minute audience Q&A
9:30 - 10:00AM	30 MINUTE BREAK: MEET THE SPEAKERS, Q&A
10:00 - 11:45AM 	WATER COMMUNICATIONS Panel Moderator Darcy M. Burke, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District, US EPA Local Government Advisory Committee Value of Water Greg Kail, American Water Works Association Communicating Tough Messages Dr. Renee Fraser, Fraser Communications Neighborhood Communications – It Started with a Water Dispenser Program Marice DePasquale, Mesa Water District 15 minute audience Q&A
11:45AM - 12:15PM	30 MINUTE BREAK: MEET THE SPEAKERS, Q&A

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Thursday, February 22, 2024



TIME	ACTIVITIES
12:15 - 1:15PM	PLATED LUNCH / HORIZON 2 BALLROOM
1:30 - 2:45PM 	FACING THE UNKNOWN Panel Moderator John Zhao, Las Virgenes Municipal Water District AI in Communications – What Works, What Doesn't, and What Your Customers Really Think Justin Wallin, Wallin Opinion Research On-the-Ground AI Demonstration Jason Assouline, WaterReuse Association & Carollo Engineers Workforce Challenges – Needed AI Skills & Talents Anona Dutton, EKI Environment & Water: Board Chair, Director of Water Resources & Engineering 15 minute audience Q&A
2:45 - 3:15PM	ICE CREAM SUNDAE BREAK: MEET THE SPEAKERS
3:15 - 4:30PM 	SIZE, LOCATION MATTERS California Small Water Systems, Panel Moderator Dan DeMoss, California Rural Water Association Smaller Agency Challenges David Youngblood, East Orange County Water District State Water Project Dependent Agencies' Challenges Christiana Daisy, Inland Empire Utilities Agency 15 minute audience Q&A
4:30 - 5:00PM	30 MINUTE BREAK: MEET THE SPEAKERS, Q&A
5:30 - 6:30PM	BOARD CHAIR'S RECEPTION / PLAZA BALLROOM

Friday, February 23, 2024



TIME	ACTIVITIES
7:30 - 8:15AM	REGISTRATION, NETWORKING & BUFFET BREAKFAST HORIZON FOYER
8:15 - 9:30AM 	JEFF KIGHTLINGER UNPLUGGED Panel Moderator Lisa Ohlund, UWI Treasurer, Ohlund Management & Technical Services Keynote Speaker Jeffrey Kightlinger, Former General Manager of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California 15 minute audience Q&A
9:30 - 10:00AM	30 MINUTE BREAK: MEET THE SPEAKERS, Q&A
10:00 - 11:00AM 	GROUP ACTIVITY: NAME THAT TUNE! with Prizes

**PLEASE BE SURE TO VISIT
OUR EXHIBITORS:**

The Climate Registry
Jennifer Persike (Book Signing)
Dr. David David Sedlak (Book Signing)