

MEETING MINUTES

California-Mexico Border Relations Council
October 23, 2023, 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. PST
(or until the close of business)

Simultaneous interpretation was provided in Spanish and English.

The agenda for this meeting can be located on the BRC webpage:
<https://calepa.ca.gov/2023-california-mexico-border-relations-council-meeting/>

- 1. Welcome – Chair Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection for the State of California, and Monica Vega, Secretary for Secretary for Environmental and Sustainable Development for the State of Baja California**

Chair Garcia welcomes everyone attending.

Secretary Mónica Vega provides her welcoming messages focused on partnership, wastewater infrastructure updates, and continued work to address waste.

Public comment: None.

- 2. Call to Order, Roll Call, and Establishment of Quorum – Chair Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection for the State of California**

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chair Yana Garcia. The meeting was held via Zoom and was also broadcast via live webcast.

At 1:07 p.m. roll call was taken, and all Council Members¹ and/or their alternates were present for the duration of the meeting as follows:

Council Agency	Council Member
1. CalEPA: Present	BRC Chair and Secretary Yana Garcia, California Environmental Protection Agency
2. CalOES: Present	Director Nancy Ward, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services

¹ Membership of the BRC is statutorily defined in Government Code section 99522.

3. **CalHHS:** Present Chief April Fernandez,
 Alternate of Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly
 California Health and Human Services Agency
4. **CNRA:** Present Deputy Secretary Noaki Schwartz,
 Alternate of Secretary Wade Crowfoot
 California Natural Resources Agency
5. **CalSTA:** Absent Toks Omishakin, Secretary
 California State Transportation Agency
6. **CDFA:** Absent Frank Salazar, Public Member
 Observer of Secretary Karen Ross
 California Department of Food and Agriculture
7. **GO-Biz:** Present Diana Dominguez,
 Trade and Investment Representative for the Americas
 Alternate for Director Dee Dee Myers
 California Governor's Office of Business and Economic
 Development
8. **BCSH:** Present Deputy Secretary Lila Mirrashidi
 Alternate for Secretary Tomiquia Moss
 Business Consumer Services and Housing Agency
9. **U.S. EPA:** Present Acting Manager Alheli Baños-Keener, U.S. Environmental
 Protection Agency
 Appointee for Regional Administrator of the US EPA, Region 9
 Martha Guzman Aceves –
 (Ex Officio, Nonvoting Member)

A quorum of 6 of 8 members was established.

3. Meeting Logistics and Interpretation Services Announcement – Chair Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection for the State of California

Chair Garcia states a change in the public comment period. Public comment will be offered after the updates from each Councilmember.

4. Regional Welcome on Local Binational Efforts – San Diego County Supervisor Nora Vargas

Supervisor Vargas provides an overview of the local state of emergency to address transboundary flows. She also underscores the need for a similar proclamation from State and Federal levels. The County continues to address dredging and debris removal. The Board of Supervisors created an Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to keep climate and environmental justice a top priority.

5. Discussion and Possible Action to Approve Draft Minutes for the Previous Meeting on November 14, 2022 – Chair Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection for the State of California

The Council reviewed the 2022 Meeting Minutes.

Motion: CalOES Director Ward moved as follows:

“Motion to approve the draft meeting minutes for the previous BRC meeting on November 14, 2022.”

Second: Deputy Secretary Lila Mirrashidi, Alternate of BCSH Secretary Moss, seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Roll call vote:

Council Member	Vote
1. CalEPA: Secretary Garcia	Aye
2. CalOES: Director Ward	Aye
3. CalHHS: Chief Fernandez (alternate)	Aye
4. CNRA: Deputy Secretary Schwartz (alternate)	Aye
5. CalSTA:	Absent
6. CDFA:	Absent
7. GO-Biz: Trade and Investment Representative Dominguez (alternate)	Aye
8. BCSH: Deputy Secretary Mirashidi (alternate)	Aye

Observer Salzar for CDFA and US EPA appointee Baños-Keener voiced their agreement with the motion.

Motion passed unanimously with 6 votes in favor and 0 votes against, 2 absent.

6. Discussion and possible action to approve the 2022 California-Mexico Border Relations Council Draft Annual Report to the Legislature and delegate authority to Secretary Garcia to finalize the Report and submit it to the Legislature – CalEPA

The Council reviewed the 2022 California-Mexico Border Relations Council Draft Annual Report and votes to delegate authority to Secretary Garcia to finalize the Report and submit it to the Legislature.

Motion: CalOES Director Ward moved as follows:

“Motion to approve the 2022 California-Mexico Border Relations Council Draft Annual Report to the Legislature and delegate authority to Secretary Garcia to finalize the Report and submit it to the Legislature.”

Second: Deputy Secretary Noaki Schwartz, Alternate of CNRA Secretary Crowfoot, seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Roll call vote:

Council Member	Vote
1. CalEPA: Secretary Garcia	Aye
2. CalOES: Director Ward	Aye
3. CalHHS: Chief Fernandez (alternate)	Aye
4. CNRA: Deputy Secretary Schwartz (alternate)	Aye
5. CalSTA:	Absent
6. CDFA:	Absent
7. GO-Biz: Trade and Investment Representative Dominguez (alternate)	Aye
8. BCSH: Deputy Secretary Mirashidi (alternate)	Aye

Observer Salazar for CDFA and US EPA appointee Baños-Keener voiced their agreement with the motion.

Motion passed unanimously with 6 votes in favor and 0 votes against, 2 absent.

7. Border 2025 Leadership Meeting Update – U.S. EPA Alheli Baños-Keener

U.S. EPA is continuing to implement the Border 2025 Program. Program’s goals are to improve air and water quality, waste management, and emergency preparedness and response. The work is community-led. These four goals each have a task force and led by chairs and co-chairs.

Border 2025 grants help provide resources to meet the goals of the program. An example of a grant is the Air and Health Surveillance System provided to Mexicali to expand existing monitoring station capacity in Mexicali and update an Air Quality Plan to assure air quality health standards are met.

There was a recent Border 2025 Leadership Meeting led by the National Coordinators, U.S. EPA and SEMARNAT. Program partners discussed progress, priorities, and next steps. The next National Coordinators Meeting will take place in early 2024.

Opportunities to engage with U.S. EPA include the National Coordinators Meeting and the Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (TCTACS). The Region 9

TCTACS are located at San Diego State and University of Arizona. Environmental and Climate Justice Change Grants will be available in Fall 2023.

Chair Garcia would like to hold space at the next Council meeting for contribution to the Border 2025 program.

Eligibility criteria for the Border 2025 Grants was discussed. As long as projects meet the goals and objectives of the program and partner with communities, they can apply. The \$2 billion for Change Grants will be made available to community-based organizations.

///

8. Discussion on Border Region Efforts, Tribal Collaborations, and Relevant Grant Opportunities

a. Councilmember Updates

i. CalOES

Director Ward: Tropical Storm Hilary impacted both sides of the border and facilitating communication was key. The Consulates provided a useful space to share information for both Mexico and California. CalOES continues to participate and facilitate collaboration between the U.S. Coast Guard and the MX Marina to provide secure waters along the coastline to Western Mexico and California.

CalOES, along with officials from federal, state, and tribal agencies, participates in quarterly Southwest border communication working groups to discuss emergency communication. The Working Group is working with technology providers to develop and process 911 calls across the border.

CalOES attended the 911 Cross Border Conference to continue mending gaps. The conference was hosted by U.S. Department of State.

In November 2023, CalOES will be delivering two emergency operation center trainings for Southern California and tribal partners.

They have been able to serve more than 500,000 migrants in California.

Public comments: None

ii. CalHHS

Chief April Fernandez: Public Health State Officer Dr. Tomas Aragorn participated in an inaugural ceremony for Binational Health Week. Binational Health Week is a

mobilization of binational collaborative efforts between U.S. and Mexico. Health promotion activities were shared for migrant population. This year's theme was Health Without Stigma and Bonding Hearts focusing on chronic diseases, mental health and addictions, women's health, and more.

Healthcare-associated infections (HAI) are a growing health concern for Mexico and California. CalHHS held a binational symposium on antimicrobial resistance, bringing in health experts from both sides of the border and forming a working group to collaborate and share best practices.

CalHHS is focused on preparing for future outbreaks of COVID-19 and are working with promotoras to inform farmworkers.

Public comments: None

iii. CNRA

Deputy Secretary Schwartz: CNRA is exploring ways to address public access while longer term transboundary flow issues are being resolved. CNRA agencies are looking at grant opportunities to fund access to beaches. State Parks will send additional State Park Passes to the local libraries. Coastal Commission has secured buses and access to other beaches. CNRA will continue working with community on alternatives as needed.

The New River Improvement broke ground in May 2023 and consists of three primary construction components: trash screen and diversion structure, bypass and encasement structure, and pump-back system that takes treated water to discharge at the New River. The total cost is \$46 million.

Public comments: None

iv. CDFA

Public Member Frank Salazar: Food and Ag continues to be engaged with Secretariat for Rural Development. Last month, Secretary Ross, hosted a Climate Smart Agriculture in Mexico City. CDFA provided overview of Climate Smart Programs focused on healthy soils, sustainable pest management, and more. It was broadcasted nationwide.

CDFA continues to work binationally to address pests.

In partnership with GO-Biz and other partners, CDFA is hosting an event called AgroBaja, which is one of the most attended events.

Partnered with CA Certified Organic Farmworkers Group and lead a trade and policy mission to Mexico City.

Public comments: None

v. GO-Biz

Trade and Investment Representative for the Americas Diana Dominguez: Mexico is one of our major trade partners, with \$460 billion of trade. GO-Biz continues strong partnerships with Baja California government and other Mexican government partners.

GO-Biz initiated trade initiatives including two outbound trade missions to Mexico City, one reverse trade mission to provide assistance to California businesses, and hosted a number of virtual exchanges to improve binational trade relationship.

GO-Biz supported business participation at a Mexico infrastructure conference hosted by the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. They reengaged the COMCAL and hosted a tri-state hybrid convening. The goal was to reenergize COMCAL following the pandemic and planning for California's transition to zero emission vehicles and the regional implications it will have at the border.

California recently met the heavy-duty ZEV vehicle deployment target two years early.

Public comments: None

vi. BCSH

Deputy Secretary Mirrashidi: BCSH continues to support border activities by providing funding to expand housing, protect consumers, and safeguard civil rights.

Throughout 2022, HCD invested over \$212,000,000 in Imperial and San Diego Counties across a variety of programs like the California Housing Accelerator Program, the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program, the Homekey program, the Housing Navigators Program, and the Transitional Housing Program.

The California Housing Finance Agency (CalHFA) program initiatives supported California-Mexico Border Relations through multiple programs: homeownership, lender training and outreach, multifamily project financing, housing counseling and mortgage relief assistance. Through the Mortgage Relief program, 1,400 homeowners in San Diego and Imperial counties were assisted, with a total value of \$42 million through mortgage relief, property taxes, partial claim/loan deferral and reverse mortgage.

The National Mortgage Settlement counseling program also provided housing counseling services to 4,950 clients in San Diego and Imperial counties.

Representatives of the Bureau of Automotive Repair and California Air Resources Board met with representatives from the state of Baja California, Mexico to exchange information on air quality improvement programs ranging from Smog Check inspections, agricultural burn days, and ambient air quality monitoring.

The Dental Board of California (DBC) is pursuing computer-based testing in Mexico. The purpose is to reduce barriers to dental licensing in California.

In San Diego and Imperial counties, the Civil Rights Department investigated more than 300 complaints of civil rights violations and secured over \$705,000 in relief settlements. Also in 2022, CRD launched the CA vs Hate Resource Line and Network to support victims of hate violence.

Public comments: None

vii. CalEPA

Secretary Garcia: We met our target to deploy heavy-duty trucks early. It is a point of concern or contention in the border region with respect to the availability of technology for heavy duty vehicles and for charging infrastructure. It is a top priority to ensure we are able to deploy the vehicles and infrastructure to make zero emission vehicles available to priority communities.

CARB is working with San Ysidro and Otay Mesa to develop Community Emissions Reduction Program and a Community Air Monitoring Plan. Under an existing MOU, CARB delivered 50 air sensors to the City of Tijuana and provided training.

DTSC inspects facilities all along the border and runs the CUPA program at Imperial County.

OEHHA is working on better refining our data and information around the border region from a pollution and socioeconomic and health standpoint. They are also looking at climate change indicators reporting.

DPR is working closely with CDFA to look at sustainable pest management alternatives, which will hopefully reduce the instances of pesticide exposures, particularly among agriculture communities. It's often difficult to track when exposure incidents happen when border communities will often seek treatment on the Mexican side. It is important that we continue to partner with Baja California to track health data.

We broke ground on the New River Improvement project after years of collaborative advocacy and almost \$50 million in investments from the state of California to address this longstanding binational pollution challenge in Mexicali feeding into Calexico.

We're continuing to focus on the needs of Tijuana River, particularly the South Bay International Treatment Plant. We want to ensure we get the funding to execute the expansion project and address deferred maintenance costs. We've been working on the Tijuana River issue for many years, including the advocacy to get the \$300 million that came in a federal appropriation through USMCA, which US EPA has been hard at work to implement. The Coastal Commission held a tour of the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve earlier that month. IBWC Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner and others attended the Commission Meeting to provide updates and hear from the public.

Public comments: None

b. Tijuana River Updates

Doug Liden, US EPA: Three notable improvements in the last year: 1) Mexico's army is implementing the third largest infrastructure project in all of Mexico. It is a highway that will run from the airport to the border. Because it needs to go through Smuggler's Gulch, they had to displace some of the sewage line. The sewage lines were damaged in the initial phases of this effort, so the army is completing fixes by this year. The pipes will be installed by November and will help alleviate some of the flows going to the Tijuana River. 2) They are also working on the International Collector (bring water from downtown to the international treatment plant) and is about 25% completed. They are hoping to complete by early 2024. 3) All approvals for San Antonio de los Buenos plant have been received and will be going out late November/early December for bids and should treat 18MGD. Should be constructed within the next two years.

US EPA is also about to approve the rehabilitate of Pump Station 1 and start construction in March 2024.

Chair Garcia: There are a lot of interested parties and weighing in on solutions. What do you all think we might be able to do to be helpful.

Director Ward: How much progress could be made prior to the winter season?

Isela Canava, IBWC: Responds to Chair Garcia and Director Ward that her presentation will have answers to their questions.

The repair of the sewage line is instrumental to reduce dry weather flows to the Tijuana River and reduce excess flows to the plant. IBWC believes much of the excess flows stemmed from the faulty pipe. The two pipelines broke in July 2022. It was only designed for 25MGD and it was taking excessive flows beyond that. There has been little investment in life cycle replacement and rehabilitation costs and continues to be a major challenge.

IBWC hired a contractor to do an assessment of the plant. The assessment shows they need approximately \$100 - \$150 in rehabilitation needs, which exceeded the original estimates.

The primary sedimentation tanks have been overloaded and clogged with trash and sediment, causing solids to carryover into the secondary treatment. This has resulted in permit exceeds in volume and effluent quality.

IBWC hopes to achieve permit compliance at the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant within 9-12 months. IBWC awarded \$10 million in capital improvements for:

- Replacing Junction Box 1,
- Rehabilitation of all the mechanical parts for primary sedimentation tanks, which have long lead times,
- Cleaning out the primary sedimentation tanks, and
- Replacement of influent pumps #1 and #5

Mexico is replacing the 42-inch wastewater line to San Antonio de los Buenos with an estimated completion of November 2023.

IBWC was part of the CalOES calls to address Tropical Storm Hilary impacts. The plant was overwhelmed and had to bypass secondary treatment and allow flows to discharge directly through ocean outfall. \$8 million has been redirected from IBWC's budget to recover from Tropical Storm Hilary. The recovery work will be done in parallel to bringing the plant back into compliance.

The priorities for the SBIWTP Expansion Project include reducing transboundary flows by 90%, expanding capacity to 50MGD, rehabilitation of existing plant, and adding peaking factor. The total cost would be approximately \$600 million. The estimated costs of the project has exceeded its USMCA funding availability by \$310 million, so the construction will be phased, based on availability of funds. Design and construction will start early 2024.

San Diego Regional Water Board Executive Officer David Gibson has been making weekly trips to the plant to meet with the area operations office and IBWC is providing him updates.

***** CDFA Public Member Frank Salazar left at 2:41PM *****

A quorum of 6 of 8 member remains, 2 absent.

Chair Garcia: If there are opportunities for targeted support or input, to please let the Council know.

CNRA Deputy Secretary Schwartz: expressed her gratitude.

GO-Biz Diana Dominguez: Added that the June trade mission GO-Biz led in partnership with Baja California had three companies engaging with multiple cities to address these water issues at a local level: one focused on treatment of toxic chemicals in potable drinking water, one looks to deploy technology to address sewage spill contamination, and one that has satellite leak detection technology.

Chair Garcia: Adds that public private partnership can be helpful in this scenario, especially before the storms commence. Asks for a written update from trade mission from Diana.

IBWC Isela Canava: IBWC is no longer looking at anaerobic digestion as it is too expensive. IBWC in collaboration with Mexico is working with NAD Bank to look at public private partnership to reuse the sludge.

US EPA Doug Liden: US EPA issued solicitation for proposals for water reuse study for the two wastewater treatment plants in Tijuana. If they can take out the treated wastewater, it would reduce the amount of water going towards the border and alleviate pressure on other wastewater infrastructure.

Chair Garcia: Adds that there were many public health officials at the Coastal Commission meeting and flagged for CDPH. The San Diego Air District has been looking into placement of air monitors.

Public comments: None.

c. Open Dialogue Session for Tribal Nations to share feedback

This agenda item was not addressed at this meeting and/or cancelled.

9. Future Meeting Dates and Agenda Items – CalEPA

Chair Garcia said she would like to have the next meeting be March or April 2024.

10. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

Public comments: None.

11. Adjournment

Chair Garcia adjourned the meeting at 3:02 pm.