



Supervisor Greg Cox  
Board of Supervisors, San Diego County  
1600 Pacific Hwy #335,  
San Diego, CA 92101

May 18, 2020

**RE: Board of Supervisors Regular Meeting Agenda Item 27, SB 1090 (Bates) – OPPOSE**

Dear Chairman Cox and Honorable Members of the Board,

We write to you with respect to Agenda Item 27, in strong opposition to SB 1090 (Bates). This bill would pave the way for private property owners to effectively hasten and accelerate the loss of public beaches throughout San Diego under the pretense of improving public safety.

It is well-documented in the scientific literature that seawalls and similar hard structures result in the loss of sandy beaches:

“A common perception is that seawalls and revetments protect the coast. Although such armoring structures may temporarily protect property from encroachment by the sea, they accelerate erosion of existing beaches and coastal habitats in the areas where they are located, limit beach access, and impede coastal recreation. Scientific evidence shows that coastal armoring structures prevent coastal ecosystems from migrating inland and cut off sand supply by preventing natural erosion processes. **Put simply, when placed on an eroding or retreating beach, armoring structures will cause that beach to narrow and eventually disappear.** Wave energy reflecting off of shoreline armoring structures also undercuts the beach and can hasten coastal erosion in front of the structure as well as on neighboring properties, harming those properties and stimulating yet more armoring. In short, many of California’s beaches, and the amenities and ecosystems they provide, may inevitably disappear due to armoring.”<sup>1</sup>

In short, natural erosion and geologic processes feed sand to the beach. By arresting that process, we lose the beach. With sea level rise now predicted to cause nearly 70 percent of Southern California’s beaches to disappear by 2100, we cannot afford to hasten this process and fail to plan for it responsibly.<sup>2</sup>

More than a third of San Diego’s coastline is already armored with seawalls, rip rap and bluff infill<sup>3</sup>. This excessive armoring has resulted in the narrowing of beaches already. Fast-tracking additional hard armoring – including with seawalls and bluff infill – will drastically speed up erosion and beach loss, leaving the public with nothing but memories of sandy shores.

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<sup>1</sup> Molly Loughney Melius, Fellow, and Margaret R. Caldwell, Director, Environment and Natural Resources Law & Policy Program, [California Coastal Armoring Report – Managing Coastal Armoring and Climate Change Adaptation](#), Stanford Law School, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Geological Survey, [Disappearing Beaches: Modeling Shoreline Change in Southern California](#), 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Kiki Patsch, [Coastal Armoring in California](#), California State University Channel Islands, 2018.

This loss of beach will affect all San Diegans. There is no economic, recreational, or quality-of-life substitute for being able to visit the beach, which is one of the most valued public trust resources in our county. As climate change continues to make inland urban communities hotter, people will seek refuge on the cooler coast.<sup>4</sup>

The California Coastal Commission has long applied the Coastal Act to implement appropriate bluff-top and shoreline setbacks for new development. Such setbacks are based on an assessment of projected erosion and related hazards at the site for the life of the proposed development **and help ensure that seawalls and other protective devices that could lead to adverse impacts would not be necessary in the future.**<sup>5</sup> In essence, the long-term planning needed to create a truly safe and healthy coastline was initiated decades ago and continues today.

According to the May 2020 Coastal Commission analysis of this bill, “the bill would effectively override the requirements of Section 30253 [of the Coastal Act] for all coastal armoring projects in Orange and San Diego Counties, and would instead require the Commission and local governments to approve all such projects within 30 days.”<sup>6</sup> The Coastal Act is arguably the strongest piece of legislation in the State of California that balances private property rights with public beach access and beach preservation at the coast.

**SB-1090 goes directly against all recent state agency guidance which emphasizes protection of coastal resources and the public trust.**<sup>7</sup> Planning for sea level rise in a safe and equitable manner will continue to require multiple policies and phased approaches. SB-1090 would have us lock ourselves into the one method we know is sure to fail and result in the accelerated loss of our beaches.

Finally, when it comes to public safety and the prevention of the tragic loss of life we’ve seen in recent years, the true solution is to prioritize preservation of our beaches. Hard armoring of coastal bluffs increases the risk to the beach-going public:

“The [California Coastal] Commission does not agree that bluff retention devices provide any quantifiable public safety benefit and therefore, this contention is not a valid reason to offer mitigation reductions for the impacts of shoreline armoring. **Passive erosion and loss of usable beach area is a direct result of shoreline armoring and can decrease the safety of a beach as areas of safe passage are reduced or eliminated.** In addition, even with shoreline protection, there is no guarantee that a

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<sup>4</sup> Kalansky, Julie, San Diego Regional Report to the Fourth California Climate Assessment. 2017. [https://www.energy.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2019-11/Reg\\_Report\\_Sp-SUM-CCCA4-2018-009\\_SanDiego\\_ADA.pdf](https://www.energy.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2019-11/Reg_Report_Sp-SUM-CCCA4-2018-009_SanDiego_ADA.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [California Coastal Commission Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance. 2018.](#)

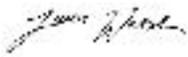
<sup>6</sup> Coastal Commission Legislative Report. SB 1090 (Bates) Analysis. 2020. <https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/reports/2020/5/w6d/w6d-5-2020-report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> The Ocean Protection Council’s Sea Level Rise Guidance 2018 Update makes a number of planning and adaptation recommendations. Notably, recommendation (2) *Adaptation strategies should prioritize protection of coastal habitats and public access lists* “implement natural solutions for shoreline protection, including managed retreat” as the first strategy; The Natural Resources Agency’s Safeguarding California plan recommends that priority should be given to options that protect, enhance, and maximize coastal resources and access, including giving full consideration to innovative nature-based approaches such as living shoreline techniques or managed/planned retreat; Principle 12 of the Coastal Commission’s Sea Level Rise Guidance document states, “Priority should be given to options that enhance and maximize coastal resources and access, including innovative nature-based approaches such as living shoreline techniques or managed/planned retreat”; In 2018, the Coastal Commission adopted a Resolution on Sea Level Rise and Shoreline Protection – a vision to protect and increase natural landscape along the California coast to face down the threats of sea level rise. The vision prioritizes increasing adaptive capacity of coastal habitats including wetlands and important habitat corridors, by identifying and planning for inland migration and other measures to protect them from sea level rise.

seawall or the bluff above a seawall will not fail and result in death or injury to beach users.”<sup>8</sup>

For all the reasons above, the undersigned, representing thousands of San Diegans, strongly oppose SB 1090.

Sincerely,



Laura Walsh  
Policy Manager  
Surfrider Foundation, San Diego County



Pam Heatherington  
Board Member  
Environmental Center of San Diego

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<sup>8</sup> [STAFF RECOMMENDATION ON CITY OF SOLANA BEACH MAJOR AMENDMENT LCP-6-SOL-16-0020-1 for Commission Meeting of May 11, 2017](#)