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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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UNDER STATE AND COMMUNITY PRESSURE, REGIONAL WATER BOARD RELEASES DELAYED CONTAMINATED SEDIMENT FILES

April 8, 2008 (San Diego) Nearly two years after the initial tentative cleanup order was proposed for the removal of 885,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment on about 60 acres just south of the San Diego-Coronado Bridge, an updated order was finally released by the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The Order and attendant record was held up by digitization delays, pagination problems, power failure losses and contractor walk-offs. After community pressure led to legislative outcry and a threat by the State Water Board to take over the process, the record was finally released to cleanup parties on hard drive as the 375,000 pages of supporting documents were too large to fit on a disk or website.

"This process was a veritable comedy of errors," said Bruce Reznik, Executive Director of San Diego Coastkeeper. "While we're thrilled to finally moving closer to a cleanup, it is disappointing that it took the Regional Board so long to get to this point. Prodding from elected and agency officials, environmental organizations and the public seem to have finally pushed the Board to action."

Environmental and community members have been advocating for the bay cleanup for decades, and eagerly await the next phase in the cleanup process, "Clean sediments are crucial for supporting a thriving ecosystem and a healthy bay," said Gabriel Solmer, Legal Director for San Diego Coastkeeper. She explained, "Cleanup is required to restore the health of the entire bay ecosystem and to protect the health of people who fish from the bay. The longer clean-up is delayed, the longer human health, fish and wildlife are put in harm's way."

news release

State Senator Christine Kehoe had also lost patience with the stalled process, chiding, in February, that “This agency has a reputation for inaction, and this week's announcement of another delay in completing the Shipyard Sediment Cleanup and Abatement project in San Diego Bay will only further postpone clean-up of this critical water body.” Kehoe later introduced legislation that would provide a January 2009 deadline for the Regional Board to adopt its final Order for cleanup.

The release of the Cleanup and Abatement Order triggers a 225-day commenting process to allow for all parties and the public to review the record and air concerns. The process culminates with a Board hearing and vote in late 2008. “If what is past is prologue, we still have a long road before the toxic sediment is cleared, said Solmer, “But we commend the Board for achieving this milestone and moving one step closer toward a clean and healthy Bay.”

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Founded in 1995, San Diego Coastkeeper protects the region's bays, beaches, watersheds and ocean for the people and wildlife that depend on them. We balance community outreach, education, and advocacy to promote stewardship of clean water and a healthy coastal ecosystem.