



# Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

## Water Resources Department

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### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Water Resources Commission

**FROM:** Douglas E. Woodcock, Acting Director

**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item I, June 16, 2023  
Water Resources Commission Meeting

#### **Follow up on Commission Discussion of the Commission's Role**

#### **I. Introduction**

During this agenda item, the Department and Commission will follow up on discussions from the February Commission meeting on the Commission's role and purpose, and how it carries out its work.

#### **II. Background**

During the February 2023 Commission meeting, some Commissioners expressed an interest in being more engaged in the policy direction of the agency. We believe that there are ways for the Commission to contribute more fully to upcoming policy work. We are interested in understanding to what degree Commissioners would like to engage, as well as Commissioner ideas on how to facilitate Commission engagement.

#### **III. Discussion**

During this agenda item, the Department hopes to get a better understanding of the gaps, if any, that the Commission perceives in its involvement in agency policy work. We believe there are ways to involve the Commission earlier and more substantively in that work, and we are interested in hearing Commissioner thoughts on that as well.

To start, the Department can focus on improving the experience of Commissioners during regularly scheduled meetings, as well as identifying opportunities for Commissioners to be more involved in existing agency policy work. There is a significant body of work ahead for the agency and Commission. The agency will soon begin development of a new Strategic Plan, due June 1, 2024, as well as developing and asking the Commission to adopt the Integrated Water Resources Strategy in March 2024. The Department believes that a retreat in September or November will be necessary to focus in on the work of the agency and its Strategic Plan. It is anticipated that the Commission and Department will develop priority work direction for the period of the plan.)

Additionally, Commissioners can attend or listen into Rules Advisory Committee (RAC) meetings for rulemaking. It would be beneficial if each complex-issue rulemaking had one

Commissioner that attended RAC meetings, as they could contribute their knowledge to the Commission agenda discussion. Significant RAC efforts that are underway include the groundwater allocation policy rulemaking and the Harney groundwater rulemaking. In addition, Commissioners can participate as hearings officer for rulemaking hearings, if desired.

In February, some Commissioners expressed a desire for more frequent regularly scheduled meetings, with the idea that more frequent meetings would lead to greater Commission engagement on policy matters. As described above, the Department has ideas for how to provide for greater Commission engagement; however, we have concerns about increasing the number of regularly scheduled meetings as a means to address the Commission's goals. For a number of reasons, the work of our staff has increased across the board in recent years. Given that the agency is already workload-challenged, the Department is concerned about adding additional regularly scheduled meetings, when there may not be a business need for those meetings. Currently, when staff or the Commission has identified a need for a particular topic to be addressed timely or a need for a focused session, the agency has added meetings to our regular schedule. These special meetings are conducted because there is a specific business need and often the scope is narrowed to one agenda item, which reduces the time and impact of staff required to prepare for the meeting. We believe this practice is effective and efficient.

A great deal of work occurs behind the scenes to ensure that each Commission meeting is successful. Generally, preparation for each meeting begins at least two months before the meeting occurs. Even with this schedule, we often have reports that come in after the due date for various reasons, ranging from workloads to the need to accommodate external factors essential to the report. We understand that this reduces Commissioner's opportunity to review and fully digest the materials before a meeting and will strive to send out the meeting materials at the earliest opportunity; however, adding additional meetings would likely exacerbate this challenge.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

As the Department continues working on existing policy issues and prepares for upcoming policy work, we need to understand to what degree Commissioners would like to engage and support this work. This understanding will assist the Department with shaping agendas, more fully engaging the Commission as a whole, and pairing individual Commissioner's interests with current and future policy work.

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