

## ACWA Keynote Speaker: Joaquin Esquivel, Chair of the State Water Board

Last week, the Association of California Water Agencies held their postponed spring conference over two days completely online. It was an interesting mix of live sessions, pre-recorded panel sessions, and Zoom chat rooms.

The keynote speakers were the highest officials overseeing state and federal water policy: Secretary of Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot, Commissioner of Reclamation Brenda Burman, State Water Board Chair Joaquin Esquivel, and Department of Water Resources Director Karla Nemeth. Their speeches will be featured on Maven's Notebook this week, but here is a brief wrap-up of events.

**Joaquin Esquivel** focused his comments on three issues: implementation of the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Act, implementation of AB 1755, and addressing racial inequalities.

**Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Act:** *"I've been quite proud of the work that the Board has done in particularly getting an expenditure plan out which details not just the expenditures in the first year of the Safe and Affordable Fund, but also those anticipated in the next year. It's an expenditure policy that better flushes out the work that the Safe and Affordable Fund will have to do over the years ahead, knowing that this is a years long effort, it's a decade of effort, and it's a generational challenge that we finally have some resources to address and have before us."*

**Implementation of AB 1755:** *"I often remark that we at the Board are nothing but a big decision making agency," Chair Esquivel continued. "The five of us state board members, and then the 60 plus regional water quality control board members throughout the state are called upon to weigh and balance, to do our best at making our most informed decisions, and continuing to make decisions off of better available and transparent data is going to be very critical."*

**Addressing racial inequalities:** *"There is a strong racial equity discussion about how do we best listen to communities, synthesize their knowledge, their understanding, and their information so that we, whether in the context of the Water Boards and its decisions or our other sister agencies so we are able to make our best and most important decision based off of the variety of opinions, information, and data that may be out there."*

Chair Esquivel noted that as the board member occupying the seat for the member of the public, he takes his position very seriously, but at the same time, he acknowledges that the board is not equipped to solve the racial inequities that are found in our society. But in the realm of what the State Water Board can do, he says it's in workforce development.

*"We oversee drinking water operator certifications as well as wastewater operator certifications. We're looking to move online, to have rolling testing ... How do we connect into a workforce development discussion that helps us continue to bring the best and brightest and most diverse minds possible to the table, to the water sector, to help us be better decision-makers in the end."*

More here:

<https://mavensnotebook.com/2020/08/05/acwa-conference-chair-esquivel-and-director-nemeth-discuss-their-plans-for-2022/>