

Controversy Makes Waves in Coastal Commission

Commissioners move to oust executive director.

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By Emily Sawicki /emily@malibutimes.com

Controversy swirled around the California Coastal Commission (CCC) this week as the February meeting agenda was released, revealing a move by commissioners to oust Executive Director Charles Lester, who has led CCC staff since 2011. Should Lester's firing receive the requisite votes at the February meeting, which will be held in Morro Bay, Calif., from Feb. 10-12, an interim executive director will be likely appointed at that time if not a new permanent executive director. Seven votes will be needed if all 12 commissioners attend the meeting, or six if 11 commissioners are in attendance. Pursuant to Government Code 11126(a), after the conclusion of the public hearing, the Commission may deliberate regarding this item in closed session, reads the February agenda, published Jan. 22. If the Commission takes any action during closed session to dismiss the Executive Director, the roll call vote will be reported publicly when the Commission reconvenes in open session. Lester has evidently invoked his right to a public hearing over his employment status, which would appear to mean he and his supporters intend to make a stand in defense of the executive director. Emails obtained by *The Malibu Times* show members of California environmental community rallying support for Lester, who is considered a steadfast advocate for environmentalism against the encroachment of coastal development. To others, this is a power struggle between outside interest groups and the commission itself. It is very important we get hundreds of people to show up [to the meeting], and not everyone can afford to make the trip so a bus will really help, wrote Una Glass, Vice Mayor of Sebastopol, Calif., and executive director of Coastwalk California, in an email. According to knowledgeable sources, it is likely that Lester ouster would not appear on the February agenda if Commissioners did not feel confident that they had the minimum votes to fire the executive director. As for which Commissioners are involved in the attempted ouster, fingers are pointing in all directions.

A voting chart also obtained by *The Malibu Times* and prepared by a branch of the Surfrider Foundation, together with WILD COAST and Environment California, shows 2015 voting broken down into anti-conservation and pro-conservation ballots cast. Edits to the chart were made by an unknown person pointing to five commissioners who allegedly wish to oust Lester — four of whom were appointed by Governor Jerry Brown. These are: Commissioners Erik Howell, Mark Vargas, Effie Turnbull-Sanders, Wendy Mitchell and Martha McClure, each of whom have cast fewer than 50 percent pro-conservation votes in 2015, according to Surfrider.

Sara Wan, a local conservationist and former Coastal Commissioner, sent an email that was obtained by *The Malibu Times*, suggesting the deeper issue is that of Brown attempting to undermine the Commissions independence and turn[ing] it over to the energy and development interests. Wan also included a threat to those whom she pegged as leading the charge against Lester (Commissioners McClure and Howell, but also Gregory Cox, Roberto Uranga and Chair Steve Kinsey); namely, that they will pay the price next time they are up for election if they support the firing.

Email from Sara Wan to the environmentalists

I am certain you have heard about the attempt to fire Charles Lester, ED of the CCC. That will be on the February Agenda, I think on the 9th.

This is a frontal attack on the independence of the Commission and the coast. Here are some suggestions as to how you can help

1. Get a message out early to every press contact you have. Charles is the symbol, not the issue. This is really about the Governor attempting to undermine the Commission's independence and turn it over to the energy and development interests. These are the same excuses that were used when they tried to fire Peter Douglas. There is nothing wrong with Charles' management style (he received a good job review in December) and there certainly is no problem with diversity at the Commission.

2. If you have contacts in Sacramento ask them to pressure the Speaker and Pro Tem to support him. Contact your local Assemblyperson and/or Senator

3. Most important, people in every district of every elected Coastal Commissioner particularly McClure, Howell,

Uranga, Kinsey and Cox need to be contacted by their voting constituents to let them know that they will pay the price next time they are up for election if they support the firing. That was one of the most important things we did last time. Even some of the Republicans who initially supported Peter's firing backed off because they were afraid of the repercussions in their own districts.

Get everyone you know to call, write letters, etc. to any Commissioners who are in your home district.

4. Send in letters to the editor. It is important to make this a major issue. In other words, create a backlash against his firing

5. Obvious: get as many people to the hearing as possible

6. If you are with a group, get them to do online petitions

We need to approach this as we did with Peter. This is war and it is no holds barred. If you care about the coast you need to join in this battle

Any questions please contact me ASAP. We don't have a lot of time. We need to be out in front of this with the press.

Sara Wan

Letter to the LA Times from Anna Christensen
 cc to Robert Uranga, Governor Brown, Calif Coastal Commission, Senate Rules Com.

In the not so civil war between those of us who believe in sharing a living planet and money hungry developers, Mr. Charles Lester has chosen to stand his ground at Morro Bay. The California Coastal Commissioners who are pressuring Mr. Lester to abandon his defense of our coastline, must now face public outcry. Who are these individuals that hold the very life of our beaches and wetlands in their grasp? That they are politically well connected, there is no doubt - no ordinary tree or seal hugger gets appointed or elected to such a powerful position. That they have rubbed shoulders with big business and their duty to protect and preserve has become compromised, is also painfully clear. So one must ask, why do we need commissioners who seek to terminate an executive director who does his job too well? We do not. It is these commissioners themselves who must resign or be removed, they are not fit to represent the people of California. Governor Brown has the authority to dismiss four of these commissioners immediately and he should do so. As of yet, however, our global environmentalist governor has failed to even comment on the issue. That he should abandon Mr. Lester and the mandate of the Coastal Commission, which Mr. Brown himself created, signals that he is surely lost in space. Governor Brown - PHONE HOME! Anna Christensen

Letter to Mayor Garcia from Anna Christensen
 Mayor Garcia, You were happy to congratulate Mr. Uranga when he was appointed to the California Coastal Commission last year, calling him an environmentalist. You might want to retract your approval as Mr. Uranga is one of the anti-environment/pro-development coastal commissioners organizing a coup to remove Charles Lester, Executive Director of the California Coastal Commission. Mr. Uranga's refusal to meet with local environmentalists adds insult to injury and brings into question the wisdom, even legality, of any single individual holding multiple positions of power. Mr. Uranga also sits on the Los Cerritos Wetlands Authority where he recently approved the consideration of 60 new oil wells to be drilled on 5 acres of this endangered public preserve. At some point, as mayor, you must speak out, silence is complicity.

Coastal Commission Conservation Voting Chart 2015
 Prepared by ActCoastal, a project of the Surfrider Foundation, WILDCOAST and Environment California

Commissioner	Appointed By	Anti-Conservation Votes	Pro-Conservation Votes	Conservation Vote Score
Mary Chutkan-Bergin	Speaker of the Assembly	1	11	75%
Carrick Green	Speaker of the Assembly	6	11	65%
David Johnson	Speaker of the Assembly	5	6	47%
Stacy Kelsey	Senate Pro Tem	8	10	56%
Roberto Uranga	Senate Pro Tem	8	8	50%
Dana Boehco	Senate Pro Tem	10	8	44%
Erica Wolf	Governor	11	8	47%
Mark Duggan	Speaker of the Assembly	11	7	50%
Ellen Tompkins-Gardner	Governor	12	6	40%
Meredydd Jones	Governor	12	5	33%
Martha McClure	Governor	13	8	38%
Gregory Cox	Speaker of the Assembly	11	6	32%

