

**United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) Science Advisory Board (SAB)
Teleconference Meeting
January 26, 2015
Meeting Minutes**

Date and Time: January 26, 2013, 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Location: By teleconference only

Purpose: to review draft SAB reports of recommendations for the EPA's Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards.

Meeting Participants:

SAB Members (see Roster¹)

Dr. David T Allen, Chair	Dr. Surabi Menon
Dr. George Alexeeff	Dr. James R. Mihelcic
Dr. Joseph Arvai	Dr. Eileen Murphy
Dr. Costel Denson	Dr. James Opaluch
Dr. George Daston	Mr. Richard Poirot
Dr. David Dzombak	Dr. David Richardson
Dr. Elaine Faustman	Dr. Amanda Rodewald
Dr. William Field	Dr. William Schlesinger
Dr. Steven Hamburg	Dr. John Vena
Dr. Cynthia M. Harris	Dr. Elke Weber
Dr. Robert Johnston	Dr. Charles Werth
Dr. Kimberly L. Jones	Dr. Peter Wilcoxon
	Dr. Dawn Wright

SAB Staff:

Dr. Angela Nugent, Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
Mr. Edward Hanlon, DFO for the SAB Work Group on EPA Planned Actions for SAB
Consideration of the Underlying Science
Mr. Christopher Zarba, SAB Staff Office Director

Meeting Summary:

Convene the meeting

Dr. Nugent, Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the chartered SAB, formally opened the meeting and noted that this federal advisory committee teleconference of the SAB had been announced in the Federal Register² (published December 30, 2014, 79 FR 75550-75551). The SAB is an independent, expert federal advisory committee chartered under the authority of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). The SAB is empowered by law, the Environmental Research, Development, and Demonstration Authorization Act (ERDDAA), to provide advice to the EPA Administrator on scientific and technical issues that support the EPA's decisions. The Federal Register notice announcing the meeting had contained a determination by the EPA Administrator that the teleconference will be closed to the public because it is concerned with recommending employees deserving of awards. Because it was a closed meeting, there were no written or oral public comments.

The meeting generally proceeded according to the agenda (Attachment A)

Purpose of the teleconference and review of the agenda

The SAB Chair, Dr. David Allen, noted that the purpose of the teleconference was to review draft SAB reports of recommendations for the EPA's Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards and to hold a brief administrative meeting.

Quality review of the draft report, *Additional SAB Recommendations (12/04/14 Draft) for EPA's FY2013 Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards*

Presentation from the Panel Representative

Dr. George Daston, Chair of the SAB Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards (STAA) Committee 2012-2014, provided an overview of the STAA awards and the committee review process. The purpose of the awards is to recognize the highest quality agency science. It is an intensive task to review nominations, but the multidisciplinary STAA committee appreciates the opportunity to review the best of agency science. The 2013 report of additional recommendations was written because the agency discovered in 2014 that a number of 2013 nominations had not been forwarded to the SAB during its original review of 2013 nominations. After discovering these nominations, the agency provided them to the SAB to review after the SAB had finalized its report on previously submitted 2013 nominations. Dr. Daston noted that the additional nominations brought the total number of 2013 nominations to 117, comparable to the total number of nominations in past years. The committee conducted the review of the additional 2013 nominations by teleconference with 12 out of 17 committee members participating.

Chartered SAB Discussion and Disposition of the Report

After Dr. Daston completed his remarks, the lead reviewers briefly summarized their written comments. Dr. Costel Denson, the first lead reviewer on the call, commended the committee for providing a sensible set of recommendations. He found it troubling that so many nominations were not included in the first FY 2013 review, which raises questions about the transparency and integrity of the review process. Although the committee handled the situation well, all nominations should have been judged at the same time for the review process to have the highest integrity.

Dr. John Vena, the second lead reviewer on the call, concurred. He recommended that the draft report explain why the report was being issued at this time and include some recommendations for improving the process. He also asked why there were no level three reports identified among the additional nominations for 2013.

Dr. Daston responded to the lead reviewers' comments. He noted that the composition of the STAA Committee has been stable for three years and that the group has been very consistent in how it reviews nominated studies and applies criteria. Although it was unfortunate that the full committee could not convene to conduct the review of the additional nominations, he was confident the full committee would have come to the same conclusion.

After Dr. Daston's remarks, the Board's general discussion began. One member suggested that the 2013 report make reference to recommendations for improving the nomination process, since those recommendations appear in the draft report on the 2014 nominations. The SAB chair suggested that the report could include a simple reference to the 2014 STAA report recommendations. Members also discussed whether there was a problematic trend in lack of level one awards for 2013 and 2014. Dr. Daston responded that the committee has been applying the stated level one criteria, which are quite high, very consistently.

Dr. Allen invited a motion for the disposition of the report. Dr. David Dzombak moved that the committee chair revise the report to include a reference to the remedial actions discussed in the 2014 letter and then send the revised report to the Board chair for final approval and transmittal to the Administrator. Dr. Peter Thorne seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously with no abstentions.

Quality review of the draft report, *SAB Recommendations (12/04/14 Draft) for EPA's FY 2014 Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards*

Dr. Allen invited Dr. Daston to provide comments particular to the committee's draft report on 2014 nominations. After Dr. Daston briefly described the eight administrative recommendations in the report, which included management controls for the nomination process, recommendations for more timely awards, and improvements to make nominations easier for the committee to review, the lead reviewers provided their comments. Dr. Denson made two points about: (1) measures to assess the effectiveness of the program and (2) asking the agency to provide a separate charge for the SAB, which would be included as an attachment to the report. Dr. John Vena observed that for 2014, only four per cent of nominations merit recommendations for level one or two awards, the lowest percentage since 2002. He also expressed concern about the small number of nominations in 2014. He asked why there was such a drop in nominations and high-level awards and whether the agency's reorganization of its research programs was responsible or if the nomination process should be improved.

Dr. Daston responded that the agency's charge to the committee was very short, i.e., to consider which nominated papers merit different level of awards. The sole state objective of the award program is to reward EPA scientists for major contributions. As long as awards are timely, they are meeting the stated objective. The award program does have the additional benefit of communicating the high level of EPA science to the scientific and lay publics. Although the SAB does not receive formal feedback on its recommendations, the agency has accepted the SAB's past recommendations to improve the STAA process. Dr. Daston noted that he shared some of Dr. Vena's concerns about the drop in nominations for 2014, although the number of nominations in 2013 was near historical norms. He remarked that some EPA managers may find it difficult to prepare the nomination package needed by the SAB STAA Committee. Regarding the lack of level three awards, Dr. Daston observed that there were some honorable mentions in 2014 that did not rise to level three awards. The criteria for honorable mention include criteria for work that is highly promising but might not be sufficiently complete or mature to merit a higher recognition. Many nominations in 2014 that merited honorable mentions met those criteria and he is optimistic that such promising research will reach fruition in the future.

After Dr. Daston's remarks, the Board's general discussion began. One member emphasized the importance of research programs' meeting their desired objectives. Another member suggested adding a separate bullet for a recommendation calling for the EPA to improve its process for generating award nominations. This recommendation would be separate from the recommendation for needed improvements in the award process. Members discussed the possibility of exploring the feasibility of circulating a sample of a good nomination packet to assist managers who find the nomination process challenging. A member made a specific comment regarding the award recommendation for economic studies, where he would have ranked the three economic studies differently in terms of the rigor of economic science. Dr. Daston responded that he could not respond in detail to the ranking of those papers during the quality review teleconference. He did note that the committee considers not only the peer-reviewed paper, but also the nomination package which discusses the paper in the context in the EPA's mission. He expressed agreement that, as the SAB receives more economics papers to evaluate, there should be more economists and other social scientists on the committee,

Dr. Allen concluded the discussion by asking for a motion to dispose of the report. Dr. Dzombak moved that the committee chair modify the letter and report to include language noting that the program appears to be meeting its objectives and a specific recommendation that the EPA should encourage nominations. Dr. Opaluch seconded the motion.

Dr. Allen concluded the quality review by expressing thanks to the STAA committee and to Dr. Daston for his leadership.

Administrative Session

Mr. Christopher Zarba, Director of the SAB Staff Office announced that Dr. David Allen's term as SAB Chair would end during this week. He expressed his personal thanks and thanks on behalf of the agency to Dr. Allen for his wisdom, energy and leadership. He welcomed Dr. Peter Thorne as the new Board Chair and announced that he would be working with Dr. Thorne to plan topics and timing for a chartered SAB meeting in the spring. He announced that the chartered SAB DFO, Dr. Angela Nugent, would retire January 30, 2015 and that Mr. Thomas Carpenter would then serve as the DFO for the chartered Board.

Dr. Nugent adjourned the teleconference at 2:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Certified as Accurate

/Signed/

/Signed/

Dr. Angela Nugent
SAB DFO

Dr. David T. Allen
SAB Chair

NOTE AND DISCLAIMER: The minutes of this public meeting reflect diverse ideas and suggestions offered by committee members during the course of deliberations within the meeting. Such ideas, suggestions, and deliberations do not necessarily reflect definitive consensus advice from the panel members. The reader is cautioned to not rely on the minutes to represent final, approved, consensus advice and recommendations offered to the Agency. Such advice and recommendations may be found in the final advisories, commentaries, letters, or reports prepared and transmitted to the EPA Administrator following the public meetings.

Attachment A
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Science Advisory Board (SAB)
Teleconference
Agenda
January 26, 2015, 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Eastern Time

Purpose: to review draft SAB reports of recommendations for the EPA's Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards.

2:00 p.m.	Convene the teleconference and call the roll	Dr. Angela Nugent <i>Designated Federal Officer (DFO), EPA SAB</i>
2:05 p.m.	Purpose of the teleconference and review of the agenda	Dr. David Allen <i>Chair, EPA SAB</i>
2:10 p.m.	Quality review of the draft SAB report, <i>Additional SAB Recommendations (12/04/14 Draft) for EPA's FY2013 Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards</i>	
	Report from the Committee Chair	Dr. George Daston <i>Chair, SAB Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards (STAA) 2012-2014</i>
	Deliberation	Lead reviewers Dr. Costel Denson Dr. John Vena
	Disposition of the Report	SAB Members
2:35 p.m.	Quality review of the draft SAB report, <i>SAB Recommendations (12/04/14 Draft) for EPA's FY 2014 Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards</i>	
	Presentation from the Panel Chair	Dr. George Daston <i>Chair, SAB Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards (STAA) 2012-2014</i>
	Deliberation	Lead reviewers Dr. Costel Denson Dr. John Vena
	Disposition of the Report	SAB Members
3:10 p.m.	Administrative Discussion	Dr. Angela Nugent Mr. Christopher Zarba <i>Director, SAB Staff Office</i> SAB Members
3:30 p.m.	Adjourn the Teleconference	The DFO

Materials Cited

The following meeting materials are available on the SAB website,
<http://www.epa.gov/sab>, at the page for the [January 26, 2015](#) teleconference:
<http://yosemite.epa.gov/sab/sabproduct.nsf/a84bfee16cc358ad85256ccd006b0b4b/73d937855c66204485257da800534e59!OpenDocument&Date=2015-01-26>

¹ Roster of SAB members

² Federal Register published December 20, 2014, 79 FR 78430-78431