

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

Date and Time: September 10, 2015, 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Location: By teleconference only

Purpose: To review draft SAB report on the EPA's 2015 Scientific and Technical Achievement Awards (STAA).

Meeting Participants:

SAB Members (see Roster¹)

Dr. Peter Thorne, Chair

Dr. Joseph Arvai

Dr. Sylvie M. Brouder

Dr. Ingrid Burke

Dr. George Daston

Dr. Costel Denson

Dr. Joel Ducoste

Dr. R. William Field

Dr. H. Christopher Frey

Dr. Kimberly L. Jones

Dr. Madhu Khanna

Dr. Francine Laden

Dr. Denise Mauzerall

Dr. Kristina D. Mena

Dr. James R. Mihelcic

Dr. Eileen Murphy

Dr. James Opaluch

Mr. Richard L. Poirot

Dr. Amanda D. Rodewald

Dr. William Schlesinger

Dr. Gina Solomon

Dr. Daniel O. Stram

Dr. Jeanne VanBriesen

Dr. Elke Weber

Dr. Charles Werth

Dr. Peter J. Wilcoxon

Dr. Dawn J. Wright

SAB Staff:

Mr. Thomas Carpenter, Designated Federal Officer (DFO), Chartered SAB

Mr. Thomas Brennan, SAB Staff Office Deputy Director

Mr. Edward Hanlon, DFO, SAB STAA Committee - 2015

Meeting Materials:

All materials for the meeting are available on the SAB webpage at:

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/sab/sabproduct.nsf/a84bfee16cc358ad85256ccd006b0b4b/38f397716ae66a9b85257e8900553a93!OpenDocument&Date=2015-09-10>

Meeting Summary:

Convene the meeting

Mr. Thomas Carpenter, 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 August 5, 2015, 80 FR 46575-46576). 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 DFO noted that the Federal Register notice announcing the meeting explains that this meeting was closed to the public. Because the deliberations and advice will involve professional judgments on the relative merits of various employees and their respective work. Such personnel matters involve the discussion of information that is of a personal nature, the disclosure of which would be a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy and, therefore, is protected from disclosure by section (c)(6) of the Government in the Sunshine Act, 5 U.S.C. 552b(c)(6). Minutes of the Chartered SAB teleconference will be certified by the chair and retained in the public record.

The DFO stated that the SAB consists entirely of special government employees (SGEs) appointed by EPA to their positions. As SGEs, chartered SAB members are subject to all applicable ethics laws and implementing regulations. The SAB Staff Office Director has determined that advisors participating in this meeting are in compliance with ethics rules that apply to them.

Quality review of the draft SAB report, STAA

The SAB Chair, Dr. Peter Thorne, welcomed members and stated that the purpose of the teleconference is to conduct a quality review on the draft report, *SAB Recommendations for EPA's FY2015 Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards (8/14/15 Draft)*³ and proceeded with the agenda. He reminded members that the purpose of the quality review is to determine if the report is ready to transmit to the Administrator as an SAB report and under what conditions. In reaching determination on the draft SAB report, he asked them to focus on the SAB's four quality review questions:

- Were the charge questions adequately addressed?
- Are there any technical errors or omissions in the report or issues that are not adequately dealt with in the draft report?
- Is the draft report clear and logical?
- Are the conclusions drawn or recommendations provided supported by the body of the draft report?

Presentation from the Committee Chair

Dr. Thorne introduced Dr. George Daston, Chair of the SAB Scientific and Technical Achievement Awards Committee – 2015 and asked him to provide background on the draft report as an introduction to the quality review discussion. Dr. Daston noted that 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. He also acknowledged the written comments received from chartered SAB members⁴ and provided an overview of the committee's review process.

Dr. Daston noted that this advisory activity is an annual activity taken on by the Board. The STAA committee has a breadth of disciplines to cover the variety of topics it encounters. He provided an explanation of the STAA committee's discussions and deliberations emphasizing their goal to provide consistent evaluation of the nominated research activities across years. The 2015 STAA committee reviewed the 118 nominations (shortened to 116 by combining four nominations to two), and recommended 84 awards (including honorable mentions). The STAA Committee draft report provides the award breakdown by award level, and also shows how the different topic categories were represented as self-reported through the nomination process. Under the "Administrative Recommendations" section, the STAA Committee gives three (3) recommendations related to the STAA nomination and award evaluation processes. He noted that while several members take the lead on

reviewing nominations committee members are asked to review all the nominations and participate in the discussions to reach a conclusion on each award. Dr. Daston noted that the agency has started a LEAN process to improve the nomination of publications and the award notification steps once the SAB has finalized the reports.

Chartered SAB Discussion and Disposition of the Report

After Dr. Daston completed his remarks, the lead reviewers briefly summarized their written comments. Dr. Sylvie Brouder, the first lead reviewer on the call, noted the charge questions were adequately addressed and the presentation of how the review was conducted is clear. She suggested that the first of the three Administrative Recommendations regarding review articles should be strengthened to state that these reviews should adhere to best practices for systematic reviews.

Dr. Kristina Mena, the second lead reviewer, agreed with Dr. Brouder's comments and thought the report was well written. She noted that the award level criteria used to evaluate nominations seems vague. As currently presented, it is difficult to distinguish between Level 1 and Level 2 awards, and Level 2 and Level 3 awards. Does this mean that awards are selected based on how the nominations relate to each other for that particular year? Should each award level criteria be so specific that each award category "stands alone"? Should the award levels consist of measurable criteria?

Regarding review articles she suggested that rather than discouraging the submission of review articles the recommendation could encourage review articles an appropriate level of rigor. Clarity is needed to inform whether review articles are appropriate nominations for these awards, and whether future SAB STAA Committees will fully consider review articles (with or without a critical synthesis) in the evaluation process.

Dr. Thorne thanked the lead reviewers for their comments and began the Board's general discussion and other members provided comments:

One member noted that there were very few Level 1 and 2 awards wondering whether this was an artifact of the decreasing budgets, a focus on mission critical assignments rather than research or a decrease in the quality of research?

Other members recognized all these possibilities and suggested the committee's recommendations could be clearer and encourage nominations. Another member suggested the administrative recommendation should be added to the letter to the Administrator.

Dr. Daston responded that language could be added to the administrative recommendations to make them clearer and provide more background material. Those revisions could be summarized and included in the letter to the Administrator. He provided an explanation of the STAA Committee's discussions and deliberations. He acknowledged members comments regarding review articles and the Board's recommendations for the agency to use the systematic review principles for literature reviews and review articles. He also noted the comments regarding the criteria and acknowledged that criteria are not rigid. He has found this to be important and useful as the committee compares nominations across a wide range of issues from engineering, to ecology, to economics. He also noted that the committee is diligent in calibrating new members to provide a consistent review. He thought the committee was consistent in their evaluations and discussed the distribution across award levels. He noted it might be helpful to provide examples to illustrate Level 1 and 2 awards, perhaps identifying those from previous years. He also emphasized that receiving a Level 1 award is highly significant.

Dr. Thorne proposed two options to revise and finalize the report (1) the report would be revised based on the Board's discussion and reviewed by the SAB Chair and Committee Chair before transmittal to the Administrator, or (2) the revised report would be reviewed by a group of self-selected members, including the SAB Chair, before transmittal to the Administrator. Dr. Thorne asked for a motion to dispose of the report. Dr. Kim moved that the Committee Chair and SAB 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. The motion was unanimously approved by voice vote with no abstentions.

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

Mr. Carpenter adjourned the teleconference at 2:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Certified as Accurate

 /signed/
Mr. Thomas Carpenter
SAB DFO

 /signed/
Dr. Peter S. Thorne
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 committee 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.

Materials Cited

The following meeting materials are available on the SAB website, <http://www.epa.gov/sab>, at the page for the September 10, 2015 teleconference:

¹ Roster of SAB members

² Federal Register published Vol. 80, No. 80 Monday, April 27, 2015 (23271-23272)

³ *SAB Recommendations for EPA's FY2015 Scientific and Technological Achievement Awards (8/14/15 Draft)*

⁴ Agenda