

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

San Diego Coastkeeper v. Baker Iron Works Inc.

San Diego Coastkeeper · No. 24-CV-1477 JLS (DEB) · Decided June 23, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Southern District of California grants the parties’ joint motion to enter a consent decree in a Clean Water Act citizen suit against Baker Iron Works, Inc. The decree requires the defendant to implement stormwater best management practices, conduct monitoring, make specified payments, and allow plaintiff inspections. The court finds the decree procedurally and substantively fair, reasonable, consistent with the Clean Water Act, and in the public interest.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Janis L. Sammartino
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Southern District of California
DECIDED	June 23, 2025
DOCKET	24-CV-1477 JLS (DEB)
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs and Defendant jointly moved for entry of a proposed consent decree resolving Plaintiffs' Clean Water Act citizen-suit claims.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The Court independently reviewed the proposed consent decree and exercised its discretion to determine whether it was fundamentally fair, adequate, and reasonable, both procedurally and substantively, conformed to applicable law, furthered the objectives of the law underlying the complaint, and was not the product of fraud, overreaching, or collusion.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished, nonprecedential district court order
PARTIES	San Diego Coastkeeper, Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation v. Baker Iron Works, Inc.

TOPICS

- clean water act
- environmental law
- remedies
- attorney fees
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

environmental law

civil procedure

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the proposed consent decree was procedurally fair and the product of good-faith, arm's-length negotiations rather than fraud, overreaching, or collusion.
2. Whether the proposed consent decree was substantively fair, adequate, and reasonable, conformed to applicable law, fell within the scope of the pleadings, and furthered the objectives of the Clean Water Act.
3. Whether the Court should enter the proposed consent decree and retain jurisdiction to enforce it.

HOLDINGS

1. The proposed consent decree was procedurally fair because the record showed good-faith, arm's-length negotiations conducted by parties represented by experienced legal and technical staff, with no indication of fraud, overreaching, or collusion.
2. The proposed consent decree was substantively fair, reasonable, and equitable because its requirements addressed the violations alleged in the complaint, furthered the Clean Water Act's objectives, did not violate applicable law or public policy, and imposed terms that were reasonable in light of the alleged violations and negotiated resolution.
3. The Court granted the joint motion, entered the proposed consent decree, retained jurisdiction for the duration of the decree to enforce its terms, and closed the case.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Before approving a consent decree, a district court must be satisfied that it is at least fundamentally fair, adequate and reasonable.” (at 2)

“In light of the foregoing, the Court finds that the proposed Consent Decree is fair, reasonable, and equitable, and that there is no indication it violates the law or public policy.” (at 6)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs alleged that Baker Iron Works, Inc.'s facility discharged polluted storm water to downstream waters and groundwater and violated filing, monitoring, reporting, discharge, and management-practice requirements under California's NPDES General Permit for industrial storm-water discharges. Plaintiffs alleged that their members lived in or recreated near receiving waters, including the San Dieguito River, San Dieguito Lagoon, and Pacific Ocean, and were adversely affected by the discharges. The proposed consent decree required Defendant to implement and monitor best management practices, prepare an exceedance-response plan, permit annual inspections, make payments to a local environmental charity and Plaintiffs, and remain subject to judicial enforcement.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs filed the action on August 20, 2024, alleging that Defendant discharged polluted storm water and violated requirements of California's NPDES industrial storm-water permit. Plaintiffs filed a notice of settlement and commenced the 45-day review period, followed by a notice of completion and a letter stating that the United States had reviewed and did not object to the proposed consent judgment. After directing the parties to file a joint motion addressing the decree's fairness, adequacy, reasonableness, legality, and consistency with the Clean Water Act, the Court granted the motion, entered the decree, retained jurisdiction for enforcement, and directed the Clerk to close the case.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- United States v. Oregon, 913 F.2d 576, 580-81, 586 (9th Cir. 1990)
- Williams v. Vukovich, 720 F.2d 909, 920 (6th Cir. 1983)
- Lares v. Reliable Wholesale Lumber, Inc., No. 8:18-CV-0157-JLS-AGR, 2018 WL 6219936, at *2 (C.D. Cal. Oct. 18, 2018)
- United States v. Pac. Gas & Elec., 776 F. Supp. 2d 1007, 1024-25 (N.D. Cal. 2011)
- United States v. Coeur D'Alenes Co., 767 F.3d 873, 877 (9th Cir. 2014)
- United States v. Montrose Chem. Corp. of Cal., 50 F.3d 741, 746-47 (9th Cir. 1995)
- United States v. Cannons Eng'g Corp., 899 F.2d 79, 84, 86-87 (1st Cir. 1990)
- Officers for Just. v. Civil Serv. Comm'n of S.F., 688 F.2d 615, 625 (9th Cir. 1982)
- San Diego Unified Port Dist. v. Gen. Dynamics Corp., No. 07-CV-01955-BAS-WVG, 2017 WL 2655285, at *7 (S.D. Cal. June 20, 2017)
- Ecological Rts. Found. v. San Diego Gas & Elec. Co., No. 24-CV-1614-RSH-MMP, 2024 WL 4495530, at *3-4 (S.D. Cal. Oct. 15, 2024)
- Sierra Club, Inc. v. Elec. Controls Design, Inc., 909 F.2d 1350, 1355 (9th Cir. 1990)
- United States v. Electron Hydro, LLC, No. C20-1746-JCC, 2022 WL 1607941, at *3 (W.D. Wash. May 20, 2022)