

## DRAFT

### **Response of Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD or District) To Marin Civil Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations *Better Service at a Lower Cost: Optimizing Essential Services for the Future of Marin ("Report")***

#### **Report Findings**

*F1. The current fragmented structure of special districts results in unnecessary duplication of administrative services and operational inefficiencies.*

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: While it is reasonable to assume there are inherent inefficiencies with the vast number of special districts in Marin, MMWD does not have the level of familiarity with other special districts that would definitively support this finding. However, as discussed later in this response, MMWD believes there is value to exploring opportunities across special districts, and even cities and towns, where some functions could be shared to achieve greater efficiency. Examples may include: safety training, risk management, infrastructure technology, and common areas of public outreach.

*F2. Some districts perform competently but lack sufficient scale to support long-term strategic investment in infrastructure, technology, staffing, and resilience.*

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: MMWD agrees that in some instances larger agencies with economies of scale may provide greater value in terms of the level and efficiency of service. The grand jury report did not provide any specific details and MMWD is not aware of specific special districts where the findings would necessarily hold. The first areas to explore further may be potential opportunities with the very high number of small sanitary districts in the County.

*F3. Smaller districts are disproportionately vulnerable to staffing disruptions and catastrophic events that could rapidly impair service delivery.*

Response - Agree

Statement: MMWD agrees that smaller agencies with fewer staff are likely more impacted by staff disruptions than larger agencies, which may be better able to absorb such changes, and this could impact their ability to respond in the face of a catastrophic event. However, the sharing of community and other agency resources could offset some of these impacts. While MMWD is unaware of any specific special districts in Marin where this would necessarily apply, it is reasonable that this concern may warrant further review.

*F4. Although consolidation is a popular idea among many elected board members, current governance structures, absence of board member term limits, and fear of loss of political influence discourage boards and administrators from initiating consolidation even when they recognize its benefits.*

Response - Partially Disagree

Statement: While MMWD agrees that politics may be a consideration at times, there are many additional factors that must be fully analyzed in conjunction with any consolidation, which factors may have equal or greater impact on the ultimate decision as to whether such an action is prudent under the given circumstances.

*F5. Service and pricing inequities currently exist across Marin and may increase if consolidation and functional collaboration do not accelerate.*

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: Service and pricing are very case-specific. A detailed financial analysis would be needed to confirm the costs and benefits for any given specific district(s). There are many factors that drive the cost of services. For example, the geography of a given area could require more lift stations for one sanitary district, thus resulting in greater operation, maintenance and long-term infrastructure costs, over another that has less elevation changes in their service areas and therefore has fewer cost for relatively the same service.

*F6. Performance metrics for essential, mission-specific services exist but they are not readily available and standardized, which prevents meaningful public comparison of district effectiveness and undermines accountability.*

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: MMWD agrees with the value of performance metrics for many types of special districts, though they may not be applicable in all circumstances. Key performance metrics utilized by MMWD include main breaks/mile, and the percent of produced water that is lost through leaks. Using metrics for more granular operational and financial comparisons, however, also known as benchmarking, is very difficult as there are many site-specific factors that drive these activities. For example, MMWD is among the highest in Northern California, if not the entire State, on the cost of infrastructure for the number of customers served. The reasons include the topography in the area, the average age of existing infrastructure, and the relative lack of population density. Trying to develop meaningful metrics whereby the public can compare the effectiveness of one district to another would be daunting, if even possible.

*F7. Without proactive reform, future consolidations are more likely to occur through crisis-driven intervention, resulting in greater disruption and higher costs.*

Response - Disagree partially

Statement: While it is accurate that often consolidation efforts are driven by crisis, it also can occur through thoughtful discussions, as has happened in Marin County with fire

services and recently with one of the sanitation districts served by Central Marin Sanitation Agency.

### **Report Recommendations**

*R1. By January 1, 2027, all special district boards should have conducted their first semi-annual consolidation exploration meeting with similar districts and will have established a regular meeting schedule moving forward.*

Status: This will be implemented in the future.

Explanation: MMWD is actively engaged with the North Marin Water District (NMWD) on a number of areas where collaboration can provide greater value to our respective organizations and customers. In May 2025, the Board of both agencies formed a "Board-to-Board" Ad Hoc Committee to facilitate regular meetings and discussion of ways to further inter-agency collaboration, including potentially sharing resources. This effort is ongoing but has already led to increased collaboration. Among the many areas where MMWD and NMWD collaborate include: water conservation messaging and joint campaigns, joint participation in a number of forums with the Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water, wholesale water provider) and other agencies who also purchase water from Sonoma Water, routine coordination of shared water facilities, and sharing of resources during emergency response, such as the 2023 landslide in North Novato that threatened a critical aqueduct owned by NMWD and utilized by both agencies.

*R2. By October 1, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should direct the development of comprehensive, cost-efficient shared services (such as IT, legal, finance, HR/payroll, harmonized compensation/benefits package, insurance) for special districts to optimize expenses and secure a Marin-wide acceptable quality standard. First limited-service offerings are encouraged to be made available by January 1, 2027.*

Response - Requires further analysis.

Explanation: This recommendation is directed to the County, and it is therefore inappropriate for MMWD to respond. MMWD believes this is an interesting concept and would support the effort.

*R3. By January 31, 2027, with the assistance of the County, all districts should develop and publish on their website standardized, comparable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with regard to service pricing, finance, staffing, operations, and customer satisfaction.*

Response - Requires further analysis.

Explanation: As described in the response to F6, the approach of developing KPIs that are standardized among similar districts is a very complex task and would require intensive effort that may not achieve the desired outcome for a uniform set of considerations. Such an endeavor to develop "standardized" KPIs would also require the participation and coordination among a number of agencies.

*R4. By January 31, 2027, each district should publicly update findings and progress regarding consolidation opportunities, and share those findings with the Board of Supervisors and the public on a semi-annual basis.*

Response - Requires further analysis.

Explanation: Consolidation discussions would require the participation of other agencies. At this time it is not possible to provide a date as to the pace of such discussions and analysis.

*R5. By January 31, 2027, the Board of Supervisors should oversee compliance with R1–R4 and update the public on the districts' performance.*

Response – Requires further analysis.

Explanation: This recommendation is directed to the County, so MMWD is unable to respond.

*R6. By October 1, 2026, in the process of implementing R1 and R2, districts should prioritize functional consolidation in operations, procurement, training, and administration as a precursor to formal consolidation.*

Response – Requires further analysis.

Explanation: MMWD supports the broad concepts laid out in the findings and recommendations. However, the level of effort required to meet this recommendation is considerable and the stated date of October 1, 2026 is not feasible. Further, as stated previously, these efforts would take more than MMWD alone to implement.

*R7. By October 1, 2026, the district's board compensation, benefits, length of service, date of term end, and expenses related to board work should be clearly and prominently posted on each district's website and updated annually.*

Status – Completed

Explanation: As per the Grand Jury Report, MMWD was identified as an example of "Best Practices" on Board compensation transparency. All of the noted items are available on the MMWD website.

*R8. By June 1, 2027, special districts should adopt term limits of two consecutive four-year terms for all board members. Staggered implementation of term limits to avoid disruptions is encouraged.*

Response – Requires further analysis.

Explanation: MMWD will place on the agenda an item to publicly discuss term limits by January 2028.

*R9. By June 1, 2027, board compensation structures should be reviewed across districts, and considered for adjustment. All components of board compensation should*

*be posted on their website (see best practice example in Appendix B).*

Status: Completed

Explanation: MMWD, as part of a routine review and update of Board policies, recently reviewed and updated its policy on Board Director's Compensation, Policy No. 42, which is posted on the MMWD website.