December 12, 2014

Sue Fry  
Mid-Pacific Region Area Manager  
United States Bureau of Reclamation,  
Bay-Delta Office  
801 I Street, Suite 140  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Mike Chotkowski  
Field Supervisor  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
San Francisco Bay-Delta Fish and Wildlife Office  
650 Capitol Mall, 8-300  
Sacramento, California 95814

Maria Rea  
Sacramento Area Office Supervisor  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
650 Capitol Mall, Suite 5-100  
Sacramento, California 95814-4706

Dear Ms. Fry, Ms. Rea, and Mr. Chotkowski:


The Delta Science Program is pleased to present the enclosed review report entitled, “Independent Review Panel (IRP) Report for the 2014 Long-term Operations Biological Opinions (LOBO) Annual Science Review.” The transmittal of this report fulfills a request from the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) to provide annual independent external review of implementation of the RPA Actions in the NMFS and the USFWS Long-term Operations biological opinions for the state and federal water projects.

The overall goal of this peer review was to inform NMFS and USFWS about the efficacy of the prior year’s water operations and regulatory actions prescribed by their respective Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives (RPAs). The review summarized lessons learned and provided recommendations for incorporating new science, to inform scientifically justified adjustments to the RPAs or their implementation to support future water years’ real-time decision making. This year’s review focused on specific issues that arose during the water year related to, 1) modified Delta Cross Channel Gate opening criteria in the Drought Operations Plan; 2) proposed modifications to the Juvenile Production Estimate calculation and use/application of data from acoustically-tagged Chinook salmon releases; 3) proposed calculations for Cumulative Salvage Index values used in estimating take of adult Delta Smelt under the USFWS Old and Middle River flow RPAs; and 4) general implementation of RPA actions under dry year conditions based on prior IRP concerns about RPA implementation under such conditions.

“Coequal goals” means the two goals of providing a more reliable water supply for California and protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Delta ecosystem. The coequal goals shall be achieved in a manner that protects and enhances the unique cultural, recreational, natural resource, and agricultural values of the Delta as an evolving place.”  
– State Water Code §85054
The independent review panel consisted of Dr. James Anderson, Dr. James Gore (Chair), Dr. Ron Kneib (Lead Author), Dr. Nancy Monsen, Dr. John Nestler, and Dr. John Van Sickle. These panel members were selected for their expertise and reputation concerning anadromous fish, estuarine ecology, hydrodynamics, transport modeling, and environmental statistics. The panel met in public meetings on November 6 - 7, 2014.

Detailed information on the 2014 Long-term Operations Biological Opinions Annual Science Review can be found on the Delta Science Program web page (http://www.deltacouncil.ca.gov/event-detail/11198). The Delta Science Program was pleased to assist in the process of evaluating the implementation of the RPAs and specific issues that arose during the 2014 Water Year through open and transparent scientific peer review.

If there are questions about the 2014 Long-term Operations Biological Opinions Annual Science Review, IRP report, or the overall process, please contact Lindsay Correa, Senior Environmental Scientist, Delta Science Program, at (916) 445-0092.

Sincerely,

Peter Goodwin, Ph.D.
Lead Scientist, Delta Science Program
Delta Stewardship Council

Enclosure

Cc: Traci Michel, United States Bureau of Reclamation
Donna Garcia, United States Bureau of Reclamation
Garwin Yip, National Marine Fisheries Service
Kim Turner, United States Fish and Wildlife Service