

## **INFORMATION ITEM**

### **Quarterly Report from the Delta Watermaster**

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**Summary:** As required by the Delta Reform Act, Delta Watermaster Michael George will make his quarterly report to the Council. He will update the Council on study of consumptive water use in the Delta, the status of the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) process for updating the Delta Water Quality Control Plan, and discuss a new effort to identify whether there is common ground to make progress on coping with future water shortages in the Delta.

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#### **Background**

The SWRCB, as the State's principal water resources regulatory agency, has statutory authority to implement and enforce many types of regulatory policies and recommendations that help implement the Delta Plan's policies and recommendations. Water Code section 85230(d) directs the State's Delta Watermaster to submit regular reports to the SWRCB and to the Council on water issues.

At today's meeting, Delta Watermaster Michael George will update the Council on the State SWRCB Consumptive Use Study, the status of the SWRCB's process for updating the Delta Water Quality Control Plan, and discuss a new effort to identify whether there is common ground to make progress on coping with future water shortages in the Delta.

#### **Consumptive Use Study**

The Delta is both a transfer point for water stored in reservoirs on upstream tributaries and a source of otherwise free-flowing water for in-Delta water-rights holders. While the amount of water diverted from the Delta by the State and federal water projects is well known, less is known about the amount of water taken and consumptively used (meaning not otherwise returned to the Delta in forms such as waste flow or runoff) by local in-Delta diverters.

Given the State's system of cascading water rights, in which upstream return flows are factored into downstream water rights, measuring and understanding consumptive use within the Delta is important not only to farmers but also to water facility managers, to water rights regulators and to those seeking to protect the Delta's human and natural ecosystem.

The Delta Watermaster in February 2015 convened State and federal agencies (including the Delta Stewardship Council) as well as a large number of water users inside and outside of the Delta to jointly sponsor a rigorous comparative investigation of the several methods for measuring consumptive use, the calibration of and among these methods in the unique settings within the Delta; and the cost, effort and reliability of applying each method.

The study, led by the Center for Watershed Sciences at the University of California at Davis, covers the entire legal Delta, plus a small amount of surrounding areas. The land use survey and preliminary field campaign were completed during the 2015 growing season; additional field work and crop change analysis will be conducted during 2016 growing season; the final peer-reviewed report of the Study will be available in March 2017.

### **Updating the Delta Water Quality Control Plan**

The SWRCB is responsible for developing and modifying the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan, which identifies beneficial uses of water in the Bay-Delta watershed, water quality objectives for the reasonable protection of those beneficial uses, and a program of implementation for achieving those water quality objectives, including flow objectives.

The Plan was last updated in 2006, and the SWRCB currently is now in the process of a phased review that will lead to updates. The Council's Delta Plan regulations (23 CCR section 5005) require consistency with the current flow objectives as well as any updates by the SWRCB, and the Delta Plan also recommends the SWRCB update flow objectives for the Delta by 2014 and flow high-priority tributaries by June 2018 (ER R1).

The Council's Delta Science Program hosted a series of workshops in 2014 to help delineate issues and the best available science related to flows into and out of the Delta, as well as related stressors.

The SWRCB is somewhat behind the schedule set forth in the Delta Plan for this incredibly complex update and the Watermaster will discuss with the Council the current status and schedule.

### **Common Ground for Coping with Future Water Shortages in the Delta**

At the request of the SWRCB, the Watermaster on July 11 convened members of the Delta water community, including Council Chair Randy Fiorini, to identify whether there is common ground from which we might make progress on intelligently coping with future water shortages affecting the Delta and get practical input from those who will be affected by regulatory or voluntary measures.

According to the Watermaster, the SWRCB is committed to a "bottom up" approach to developing improved, more transparent, more predictable and more effective tools for administering the water rights system in the unique Delta settings under future drought conditions.

The Watermaster will discuss the outcomes of this first meeting and future directions.

### **Fiscal Information**

Not applicable.

### **List of Attachments**

None.

### **Contact**

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