DELTA STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL
A California State Agency

980 NINTH STREET, SUITE 1500
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814
WWW.DELTACOUNCIL.CA.GOV
(916) 445-5511

Chair
Phil Isenberg

Members
Frank C. Damrell, Jr.
Randy Fiorini
Gloria Gray
Patrick Johnston
Hank Nordhoff
Frank L. Ruhstaller

Executive Officer
Christopher M. Knopp

January 13, 2014

Dear Council Members:

You generously selected me Chair of the Delta Stewardship Council in 2010. The four-year statutory limit on being Chair is up soon, and I have added the selection of a new DSC Chair and Vice Chair to our Agenda for January 23, 2014.

My deep thanks for your support during these early years of the Council. I cannot think of a better example of how well the Council worked together than our unanimous adoption of the Delta Plan. I look forward to my remaining two years of service as a member, confident that the Council will push the important water, environmental and public policy issues that form our mandate.

This will be my last chance to address you as Chair, and I would like to summarize my own view of what we have done, and what is to follow.

The Council has complied with our important statutory mandates.

> **Selected top-flight scientists** to be members of the Delta Independent Science Board, and selecting internationally respected scientists like Dr. Cliff Dahm, and now Dr. Peter Goodwin as our Delta Lead Scientist.
>
> **Adopted an Interim Delta Plan in 2010**, that somewhat peculiar mandate of law that turned out to be a test run for us on how to develop the Delta Plan. At the same time, **we approved our rules for hearing an eventual BDCP appeal**, the much-debated tunnel and ecosystem proposal.
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> **Adopted our Delta Plan in 2013**, which establishes how California will address water and environmental problems in the years to come. This followed more than two years of public hearings, reams of letters and comments, eight public drafts of the Plan, and its required environmental documents.
>
> **Accepted a Delta Science Plan in 2013**, which helps to structure the abstract promise that more and better independent science will be a required part of our current and future water and environmental actions.

In 2014, 'covered actions' of state and local agencies, as defined by law, will move through the review and evaluation process; some will be appealed to the Council, and will be controversial. State policymakers will decide on the terms of the water/Delta bond currently on November's ballot. The Bay Delta Conservation Plan will move ahead, and eventually the Council will hear an appeal of some aspects of the BDCP. These matters will consume much of our time.

Implementation of the Delta Plan is what really matters. In creating the Council, the Legislature recognized the need for an independent agency who can keep the focus on the long-view, and who can promote a comprehensive approach. Our water supply is finite, and increasingly erratic. Water conservation and water system efficiencies are the only currently available source of significant 'new' water for California. Making significant improvements in the Delta ecosystem is both legally required, and morally necessary. Groundwater overuse continues and unless halted will destroy the valuable underground water supply, which is a public resource, not private property.

If we want our society to prosper, and our environment to be protected everyone in California needs to be far more prudent in the ways we use water. The tragedy of our current public debate is that it focuses on blaming 'someone else' for all our problems, demanding that someone else pay for needed water system development, or ecosystem improvements, or flood protection that we demand. The truth is that all of us are partially responsible for excessive demand on our water supply, and for the environmental problems of the Delta. Very few of us treat water as a scarce commodity.

The six large things that drive the Delta Plan

It is a challenge to summarize the comprehensive Delta Plan --- including its 14 regulations and 73 non-binding recommendations --- but the Executive Summary did it well.

- *" In order to improve and secure our water supply, while taking pressure off the Delta, we must use water more efficiently in cities and on farms and develop alternative, usually local, sources. "*

- *We must also get very much better at capturing and storing the surplus water that nature provides in the wettest years, building reserves that can be drawn on in dry ones.*

- *To revitalize the Delta ecosystem, we must provide adequate seaward flows in Delta channels, on a schedule more closely mirroring historic rhythms: what the Plan calls natural, functional flows.*

- *We must also bring back generous wetlands and riparian zones in the Delta for the benefit of fish and birds.*

- *To preserve the Delta as a place, we must restrict new urban development to those peripheral areas already definitely earmarked for such growth, while supporting farming and recreation in the Delta's core.*

■ *And we must flood proof the Delta, as far as feasible, mainly by improving levees and by providing more overflow zones where swollen rivers can spread without harm."*

Add to this list elevating the role of independent science in water and ecosystem operations, management and construction; the need for immediate groundwater regulation; and the effort to get government agencies to cooperate through the statutorily mandated Delta Plan Implementation Committee, you have a good summary of what must happen in short order.

The soon to be released Governor's California Water Action Plan reads a lot like the Delta Plan. The Delta Plan reads like much of the last four versions of the State Water Plan Update prepared by the Department of Water Resources. All assume that the State Water Resources Control Board water quality standards will be updated. This similarity is a very encouraging sign that we are finally moving forward on a comprehensive water and environmental policy for California, one that balances our water demands to the supply available.

Litigation to test everything

Passing a law does not change human nature. California's battles over water are historic and ongoing. I suspect they will never end. The lawsuits challenging our Delta Plan --- by water exporters, some environmental organizations, and various in-Delta interests --- were predictable.

I found it ironic that the sum total of the litigation argues that we either "went too far" or, "didn't go far enough", or that the Delta Plan is either, "a tool of BDCP" or "hostile to BDCP". In the fractious world of California water policy, this illustrates that we probably exercised balanced judgment, consistent with our statutory direction.

The role of the Delta Stewardship Council

The Council does not build things. We do not have hundreds of employees, or billions of dollars in grants to give away. We operate within a government system that divides authority between hundreds of federal, state and local agencies. However, the Council does have as its main focus a statutory mandate to promote and help achieve the coequal goals.

The Council serves as a constant voice reminding government agencies that the coequal goals are the law of California, not just a goal. The Council serves to remind everyone that state law requires reduced reliance on water from the Delta. And the Council must make it clear that we can move forward as a society only through serious, sustained and constant water conservation by everyone, and increased water efficiency by everyone, and improvement in the Delta ecosystem. In this regard, the Council is unique.

As we find ourselves in yet another California drought, we need to remember that the only way out of our problems is by plugging away at actions that reduce the damage from dry years: storage, conservation, improved water storage and efficient water delivery systems, and increasing reliance on diverse local water supplies.

The Council's modest regulatory authority helps step forward on our statutory mandate. Success turns on being honest in public about what society can, and cannot do. Prudence is the key word, both in water use and in estimate of what amount of water society can guarantee, when Mother Nature is not cooperating.

It has been, and will be an honor to serve with you. Together with our talented staff of senior policy managers, scientists, engineers, planners and our long-suffering operational staff, we can move forward with confidence.

Sincerely,

Phil Isenberg

Phil Isenberg, Chair
Delta Stewardship Council