

Science Panel Reports to State Board on Delta Flows

Summary: Representatives of two independent science panels will present the highlights of the conclusions and recommendations contained in their reports to the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board). These workshops addressing “Delta Outflows and Related Stressors” and “Interior Delta Flows and Related Stressors” were held in February and April 2014 respectively. A representative of the State Water Resources Control Board will discuss how these workshop reports will inform their review of Delta flow standards.

Background

The Delta Reform Act (Water Code Section 85023) stresses that the longstanding principle of reasonable use and the public trust doctrine shall be the foundation of state water management policy and is particularly important and applicable to the Delta. The Delta Plan recognizes the need for updated flow regulations to achieve the coequal goals and includes a recommendation that the State Water Board to update its Delta flow objectives. At the request of the State Water Board, the Delta Science Program conducted two workshops to help the State Water Board with its review of and inform its revisions to the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary (Bay-Delta Plan). The workshops help fulfill the Council Science Program’s mission of providing the best possible unbiased scientific information to inform water and environmental decision makers in the Delta (Water Code Section 85280(b)(4)).

The State Water Board, in accordance with recommendation ER R1 of the Delta Plan, is in the process of conducting a phased review and update of the 2006 Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan, including flow objectives for the Delta. The Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan establishes the water quality and flow objectives for the Delta that, when implemented through water rights permits, control operations of the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project.

The Water Quality Control Plan identifies beneficial uses of water, water quality objectives for the reasonable protection of those beneficial uses, and a program of implementation for achieving the water quality objectives. Phase 1 of that review is focused on southern Delta water quality and San Joaquin River flows. Phase 2 (Comprehensive Review) is focused on other changes that may be needed in the remainder of the Bay-Delta Plan to protect fish and wildlife beneficial uses.

According to Delta Plan Policy ER P1:

The State Water Resources Control Board's Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan flow objectives shall be used to determine consistency with the Delta Plan. If and when the flow objectives are revised by the State Water Resources Control Board, the revised flow objectives shall be used to determine consistency with the Delta Plan.

Workshop Reports and Relationship to Delta Flow Standards Development

The purpose of the workshops was to identify the best available science to inform the State Water Board's decisions. For each of the two flow topics, independent panels of science experts were provided the necessary scientific publications, reports, and presentations to assess the state of scientific knowledge pertaining to the appropriate Bay-Delta ecosystem indicators. For Delta outflows, these are primarily indicators of low salinity zone productivity, such as measures of phytoplankton abundance and population indices of estuarine fish including Delta Smelt and Longfin Smelt. For interior Delta flows, survival of juvenile salmon and smelt are the primary concerns. For both of these categories of flow, interactions of non-flow factors (related stressors) with Delta flows were considered.

Today's Presentation

Representatives of the two workshop panels will present highlights of the conclusions and recommendations contained in their reports to the State Water Board. A representative of the State Water Board will discuss how these workshop reports will inform their review of Delta flow standards.

The panelists are:

- Dr. Denise Reed for "Outflows and Related Stressors". Dr. Reed is chief scientist for the Water Institute of the Gulf and is an expert in coastal marsh sustainability and the role of human activities in modifying coastal systems. She has studied coastal issues in the United States and around the world for over 30 years.
- Dr. Kenneth Rose for "Interior Delta Flows and Related Stressors". Dr. Rose is a professor of Oceanography and Coastal Sciences at Louisiana State University with a strong research record on fish population dynamics and responses to multiple stressors, climate change effects on marine and freshwater fish, and ecological forecasts.
- Les Grober is Assistant Deputy Director for the Division of Water Rights at the State Water Board where, among other duties, he oversees the Water Quality Certification and Public Trust Section.

Additional information about the workshops including the charge to the panel, workshop presentations, recorded workshop video, and the panels reports are posted here:

Workshop on Delta Outflows and Related Stressors

<http://deltacouncil.ca.gov/science-program/workshop-delta-outflows-and-related-stressors>.

Workshop on Interior Delta Flows and Related Stressors

<http://deltacouncil.ca.gov/science-event/10470>.

List of Attachments

Attachment 1: Workshop on Delta Outflows and Related Stressors - Panel Summary Report

Contact

Sam Harader
Program Manager II

Phone: (916) 445-5466