

Southern California Water Committee

Review of

draft

Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta
Water Supply Paper

prepared for

Bay-Delta Oversight Council

February, 1994

report

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Executive Summary

The Southern California Water Committee was founded in 1982 as a non-profit, non-partisan, public education partnership dedicated to informing Southern Californians about our water needs and our state's water resources. Spanning Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Bernardino, Riverside, Ventura, Kern, and Imperial Counties, the Water Committee's 450 members include representatives from business, government, agriculture, water agencies, and the general public. Our goal is to secure an adequate, reliable, high-quality water supply statewide by maximizing California's water resources for the benefit of current and future generations.

The following review of the Bay-Delta Oversight Council's draft Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Water Supply Paper is based on policies adopted by the Southern California Water Committee's Board of Trustees. One principle underlies the SCWC position: Southern California's economic well-being and the quality of our life depends upon a reliable, affordable, and quality water supply. Southern California's natural water supplies meet less than one third of our current needs. Water from the Bay/Delta Estuary is the lifeline to feeding our region's population, to jobs, to our quality of living, and to our economic vitality. Our water system is in trouble and the consequences are too enormous to continue with a deadlock on major Delta improvements.

In summary, the SCWC supports the Bay-Delta Oversight Council's draft Delta Water Supply Paper's analysis of the current status of the Bay/Delta Estuary and concurs that actions must be taken now to improve the design and operation of California's water export systems. The Southern California Water Committee supports the Bay-Delta Oversight Council's efforts to focus on the Delta's integral role in water resource management for our state. It is of increasing importance that we secure the Estuary's capabilities to satisfy the economic and environmental needs of our state.

report

SECTION I. CALIFORNIA'S WATER SUPPLIES

California Water Plan update Bulletin 160-93 depicts a dire outlook for California's water supplies. The Southern California Water Committee agrees with BDOC's Draft Water Supply Paper that if solutions to complex Delta problems are not found and proposed state and local water management programs are not implemented, projected shortages or groundwater overdraft will be larger than forecast in Bulletin 160-93. Regardless of the debate over the acre feet of water that may be dedicated to environmental purposes, or to the statistical soundness of the water predicted to be available during average or drought years, we must solve our water needs by adopting one solution. And, the single most important action will be solving key issues in the Delta. In a recent quote attributed to Governor Wilson, "Until we jointly identify and implement feasible solutions, the 'broken' Bay/Delta will continue to tragically pit the national resources of one of the nation's most important estuaries against the water needs of 32 million Californians and the most productive state economy in the country."

At recent public hearings by the California Water Commission, Southern California Water Committee Chairman, Donald Hanley testified that although the Bulletin is statistically rigorous and is an accurate and orderly framework for planning, it does not provide solutions for the state's water problems. Bulletin 160-93 describes in great detail current and future water shortages, but understates the urgency of the situation. Although the Bulletin documents that shortages experienced during the most recent drought will be more common in the future, it actually exposes a situation that is at crisis proportions today. The Bulletin forecasts a state population of 49 million people by the year 2020; it identifies the savings assumed to be possible through conservation, reclamation, water marketing, and other water management tools; and for the first time accounts for environmental desires separately from urban and agricultural demands. However, the way the growth of water demands in Bulletin 160-93 is presented, it gives a sense the water system is able to meet present demands and that as demands increase to the year 2020, there are ways that demands could be decreased and supplies can be increased to maintain a balance. The Southern California Water Committee believes we are already walking the edge of the precipice. Increases in demand under consideration at the present will throw California's water balance completely out of balance before any logical, remedial actions can take place.

The Southern California Water Committee recognizes that conservation and reclamation will add more usable water to available supplies, that voluntary water transfers from agricultural to urban areas is an important ingredient in sound water management and that water banking and storage are critical components to reliable water systems. We concur with BDOC's Water Supply Paper that our water system is in trouble and the consequences are too enormous to continue the deadlock on major Delta improvements.

SECTION II. IMPORTANCE OF THE DELTA TO THE STATE'S WATER SUPPLY

Given that the Delta is the most important feature in the state's water supply picture, the Southern California Water Committee, in 1993, established a task force charged with analyzing the State Water Project and developed a paper that addressed the pros and cons of improving the State Water Project. Membership on this task force represented diversity and perspectives from our eight counties and five sectors. A report and recommendations were received and approved by the SCWC Board of Trustees at their annual meeting in late October, 1993.

The State Water Project Task Force undertook the following key actions:

- a review of the present status of the State Water Project
- a review of potential improvements to physical facilities of the Project
- an understanding of the impediments and constraints for SWP improvement
- policy recommendations and the basis for those conclusions and recommendations

Attached to this review is a copy of the task force report which details specific recommendations to improve the State Water Project.

As stated in the BDOC Water Supply Paper, the State Water Project was contemplated to include facilities and obtain water rights to permit delivery of 4.2 million acre feet per year. Now, thirty years later:

- project demands have not been realized
- facilities have not been constructed
- rights to water have not materialized
- new laws have prevented not only construction of facilities, but also constrained the operation of existing facilities

The State Water Project is capable of reliably delivering less than half of the amount of water it is obligated to under the original water service contracts.

The Southern California Water Committee supports a common sense approach to the critically-needed improvements to the State Water Project that recognizes the value of the Sacramento Delta to all citizens and we call for a fair sharing of the costs of environmental improvements to the Delta from all contributing and benefitting interests.

Specifically, the SCWC supports a Delta solution that directs State Water Project exports around the Delta and advocates for an aggressive schedule to develop corrective measures to

fix the Delta. Solving the Delta problems is paramount to moving forward. Added reservoir storage south of the Delta, an element in Governor Wilson's Comprehensive Water Plan, is dependent on Delta corrective measures.

The Southern California Water Committee also believes that improvement to ecosystems and resource water development must be concurrent. Although nearly everyone involved with the Delta issues agrees that the environmental situation within the Delta has been deteriorating for some time, and that the deterioration has accelerated greatly in recent years. The export of water from the Delta by the State Water Project and the Central Valley Project, although often singled out as the cause of all Delta problems, simply is not the case. As noted in the BDOC Water Supply Paper, local farming practices, increasing numbers of disruptive non-nature fisheries, and an historic six-year drought are among other factors that effect current Delta deterioration.

One of the more subtle constraints to improvement of the State Water Project, the Southern California Water Committee believes, is the conflict between the dual roles of the Department of Water Resources as both the owner/operator of State Water Project and as an arm of the Resource Agency. The Water Committee supports creation of a task force to evaluate the need for reorganization of the State Water Project administrative structure that would place control of the Project in a new public and private entity which would have the authority and responsibility to produce and protect Project yield in a utility-oriented approach.

Any improvements to the State Water Project must recognize the value of the Delta to the entire state. Fair share costs to environmental improvements must be identified and calculated appropriately to assure that those costs are apportioned to all contributing and all benefitting interests. It is critical that we balance the need for real economic vitality and quality-of-life enhancement with theoretical environmental improvement.

SECTION III.
FACTORS AFFECTING THE USE OF DELTA SUPPLIES

The Southern California Water Committee shares the conclusions of the BDOC Water Supply Paper in noting that regulatory actions in combination with cost of compliance without marked consensus among water users and environmentalists have brought California's water development to an impasse. Recent federal decisions regarding the protection of the San Francisco Bay Sacramento-San Joaquin Estuary will further compromise Southern California's water supply and handicap recovery from our current economic recession. The Southern California Water Committee believes that U.S. EPA's December 15, 1993, proposed standards in the Bay/Delta Estuary are unacceptable. They will severely impact reliability of Southern California's water supplies and cost our region billions of dollars. As an organization, we are urging EPA to develop comprehensive restoration actions to protect the Bay/Delta ecosystem in an economically sound manner. We need to solve the need for environmental protection without losing sight of the very critical objective of ensuring that our state remain a strong and vital contributor to our nation's economic health and productivity.

SECTION IV. WATER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS AND DELTA TRANSFERS

The Southern California Water Committee's study of this subject concluded that voluntary transfers are an important ingredient in a flexible, reliable, and economic water supply system along with sound water management practices, water reclamation and new supplies that will improve water supply reliability. The Southern California Water Committee supports water transfers between willing buyers and sellers with the full protection of historic water rights. The construction of water conveyance facilities, however, is needed in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to protect the environment and to allow broad geographic implementation of transfers. A streamlined permitting process is imperative to eliminate bureaucratic and regulatory overlapping responsibilities and this would require new legislation. Again, the Southern California Water Committee concurs with BDOC's Water Supply Paper that recent actions to protect fisheries in the Delta will result in curtailed pumping capability of the Project, resulting in limitations on the State Water Project and the facilities to convey or wheel transfer water.

Water transfers today are tied up by bureaucratic overlap and confusion given the number of agencies and the interpretation of legislative acts. Enforcement of the federal Endangered Species Act and the federal Clean Water Act are also inhibitors of water transfers. These federal Acts, as enforced, do not provide for balancing the needs for competing beneficial water use. Overlapping responsibilities have created a quagmire of gridlock. The Southern California Water Committee supports actions which seek to achieve a balance of human and environmental factors in considering water transfers and which will provide efficiency of transfer authorization.

CONCLUSION

The Southern California Water Committee is committed to participating in the development of a comprehensive solution that achieves the important objective of ensuring that our state meets all the current and future beneficial uses of California's water resources. The Water Committee asks that each of the members of the Bay-Delta Oversight Council lead the state in calling for immediate improvements in the State Water Project as the solution to our water supply needs. We as a state must move forcefully toward completion of the State Water Project as it was originally envisioned. It is time for Californians to be united in survival--actions to solve our water problems need to be taken now.