

Solving the problem

A team of agency and stakeholder experts (the Diversion Effects on Fish Team) convened in March 1998 to evaluate the effectiveness of CalFed's proposed infrastructural alternatives on promoting the recovery of aquatic resources. The team reported that the preferred alternative should include an isolated facility to minimize diversions from the delta, but concluded that a great deal of uncertainty surrounded the effectiveness and impacts of such a facility. The team was then asked to develop an alternative that could be in operation for the first seven years. The alternative should adequately protect fish and also provide a more certain basis for decision-making at the end of the seven years. Focusing on the first seven years greatly limited the infrastructural changes, habitat changes, and even demand management changes that could be included. Therefore, the team focused primarily on operational changes to protect aquatic resources. These operational changes ranged from new sets of regulations, to direct reductions of exports whenever fish were entrained, to the identification of blocks of water that could be actively managed by the regulatory agencies. After much discussion, the use of a block of water (the EWA) has come to be seen as a tool that would allow any of the protective measures that have been considered. In addition, the EWA sets a definable limit on impacts to other users while maximizing opportunities and incentives to learn more about the biology of the ecosystem. A better knowledge of the ecosystem will be essential for decisions into stage II.