



Memorandum

Date: February 9, 2000

To: Bay-Delta Advisory Council

From: Steven R. Ritchie
Acting Executive Director 

Subject: CALFED Bay -Delta Program Preferred Program Alternative and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Report

Summary

The CALFED agencies have identified a Preferred Program Alternative that is one of several alternatives being examined in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Report (EIS/EIR). The Preferred Program Alternative describes the policy direction and long-term plan the CALFED agencies propose to follow to restore ecological health and improve water management for beneficial uses of the Bay-Delta System. The Program has been busy reviewing and commenting on the thousands of comments received on the EIS/EIR.

The EIS/EIR is expected to culminate in a final decision documented in the federal Record of Decision and State Certification. Approval of the ROD/Certification will not, in itself, enact any changes in law or regulation and will not authorize construction of specific projects. Instead, the programmatic decision describes the range of actions which collectively will meet the Program goals and objectives, and set the framework for future decision on these actions.

BDAC will be asked on February 17, 2000 to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Preferred Program Alternative and to identify issues to be addressed as part of the decision-making framework.

CALFED Agencies

California The Resources Agency
Department of Fish and Game
Department of Water Resources
California Environmental Protection Agency
State Water Resources Control Board
Department of Food and Agriculture

Federal Environmental Protection Agency
Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Geological Survey
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Forest Service
Department of Commerce
National Marine Fisheries Service
Western Area Power Administration

Description

With a program as complex as the CALFED Program, implemented over 30 years, and intended to resolve many long-standing difficult problems, the CALFED agencies expected a substantial volume of comments following the release of the Programmatic EIS/EIR last June. CALFED and agency staff have been reviewing and responding to the more than 4,000 comments that were received. Attached you will find a brief summary of some of those comments and responses. I draw your attention particularly to the first response which describes the nature of the programmatic decision and how that differs from decisions on specific or individual actions. This distinction is essential in understanding the nature of the decision the CALFED agencies will make.

Also attached is the Preferred Program Alternative that sets the long-term direction of the CALFED Program. In responding to the comments, the agencies made some clarifications, but do not propose significant changes to the Preferred Program Alternative. Once adopted by the state and federal agencies at the conclusion of the EIS/EIR process this summer, the Preferred Alternative would provide the general plan for long-term implementation of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program.

After the agencies have considered BDAC's assessment of the Preferred Alternative, they will finalize the EIS/EIR and seek to further refine immediate implementation plans (refining program plans, for example) and institutional arrangements (governance, for example). The CALFED agencies plan to resolve these outstanding issues by this summer. CALFED will continue to consult with BDAC on the status of those products at their spring and early summer meetings.

Action

BDAC is being asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the CALFED Preferred Program Alternative and to identify issues to be addressed as implementation plans and institutional arrangements are refined.