April 4, 1999

To: Policy Group

DRAFT

From: Lester Snow

Subject: South Delta Improvements

Summary

The attached documents outline a comprehensive approach to resolving fisheries, water supply reliability, and water quality concerns in the south Delta region, drafted by the permit and wildlife agency participants on the South Delta Improvements Team. The documents were drafted to define the participants' vision of south Delta improvements actions which would allow the SWP export facilities to operate to the full export capacity of 10,300 cfs when conditions warrant, address local water quality and quantity concerns, and move threatened and endangered fisheries resources toward recovery. The documents include a proposed revised Project Purpose and Need statement to reflect a broadened focus, a list of common Stage 1 actions, and two approaches to addressing local water quality and quantity needs. The first approach includes permanent operable barriers in south Delta channels to control water stages, circulation patterns, and water quality, the second approach relies on channel dredging and re-operation of the San Joaquin River to achieve those objectives.

These documents are works-in-progress, developed to assist the CALFED Policy Group in its efforts to define the policy framework for planning south Delta improvements. The comprehensive approach to south Delta concerns set forth in these documents can be evaluated along with a broad array of alternatives developed over the past decade, with multi-agency participation, by DWR and USBR in the Interim South Delta Program. Although modeling is already underway to evaluate some of the critical benefits and impacts of this comprehensive approach, the SDIT will need Policy Group guidance to appropriately refine the approach further.

Background

Over the past several years CALFED agencies and stakeholders have developed and considered three alternative programmatic approaches to resolving concerns surrounding the Bay-Delta system. After circulating a draft programmatic EIR/EIS in March, 1998 and evaluating input from the stakeholder community, CALFED adopted a staged decision-making, staged implementation approach to the design of the preferred alternative. CALFED selected a to Delta conveyance strategy of first developing a through-Delta conveyance alternative based on the existing Delta configuration with some modifications, evaluating its effectiveness, and adding additional conveyance

and/or other water management actions if necessary to achieve CALFED goals and objectives.

In selecting this strategy, CALFED deferred a decision on implementation of dual conveyance of Delta exports, while acknowledging that this alternative component was most likely, based on available scientific and engineering considerations, to provide the most effective approach to resolving conflicts between fisheries, export water quality, and water supply reliability concerns. With the remaining structural and operational solution options on the table, CALFED analyzed potential approaches to achieving incremental gains in all resource areas during Stage 1 of implementation.

It became clear during the course of those analyses that additional operational flexibility for Delta export facilities would be needed to concurrently improve fisheries resources, water quality, and water supply reliability. As a result, it was agreed that achieving an full export capacity of 10,300 cfs at the SWP Banks Pumping Plant, along with implementation of an environmental water account, would be critical to the successful implementation of the CALFED Bay-Delta Program. Workgroups were established to expedite the formulation and evaluation of solution approaches for both of these solution components.

The South Delta Improvements Team convened on December 8, 1998, and has been meeting regularly since then to review, formulate, analyze, and recommend an appropriate suite of actions to achieve a full export capacity of 10,300 cfs as the SWP Banks Pumping Plant while concurrently addressing fisheries impact concerns and local water supply and water quality concerns (collectively referred to as South Delta Improvements).

The SDIT first reviewed progress to date and concerns surrounding the available suite of alternatives proposed by DWR and USBR in the 1996 draft ISDP EIR/EIS. The SDIT then brainstormed to assure that all potentially feasible options were on the table for consideration. Next, the group conducted analyses at various levels of intensity as warranted by the various brainstorming options. In reviewing these options it became clear to some members of the SDIT that a comprehensive approach, including extensive ecosystem restoration actions, would need to be taken to avoid a jeopardy opinion under the Endangered Species Act, if SWP export capacity were boosted to 10,300 cfs. A subteam was established, with participation by the Corps, NMFS, USFWS, and CDFG to formulate such a comprehensive approach to SDI. The attached draft documents are the result. At this point these documents do not reflect consensus of the SDIT participants, but they do reflect a very significant step forward in that they begin to define a vision for a successful, integrated solution to south Delta concerns.

The urgency of the SDIT deliberations has been heightened due to regional concerns about implementation of the Vernalis Adaptive Management Plan, which has the potential for exacerbating south Delta water quality problems. In response to these concerns, the CALFED Policy Group has committed to making a decision on the approach to South Delta Improvements at its May 15 meeting. This decision would be

reflected in the revised draft programmatic CALFED EIR/EIS as well as in the project-level South Delta Improvements EIR/EIS.

Action Required

The SDIT is seeking Policy Group guidance on how to refine the proposed SDI alternatives prior to the May 15 decision date. Guidance would be helpful on three key points:

- Is the proposed comprehensive approach set forth in these documents preferable to the more focused suite of actions proposed by DWR and USBR? The new approach bundles ecosystem restoration actions with facilities and operational changes to address water supply reliability and water quality concerns. This will likely require that several CALFED agencies become joint lead agencies for SDI, with revised and expanded environmental documentation and 404 permit compliance documents.

- Should the SDIT subteam continue to refine and evaluate both the barrier and non-barrier alternative approaches?

- What policy guidance might be provided in the refinement of specific physical and operational elements of the barrier and non-barrier alternative approaches?