

# Deadline for Delta Standards

**T**HE COMBATANTS in California's decades-old water wars have come a long way toward a comprehensive truce in the year since the federal Environmental Protection Agency set a Dec. 15, 1994, deadline for new protections of all aquatic species and habitats in San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. By tomorrow, farmers, cities, envi-

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ronmentalists, and federal and state resource agencies must all move the extra yard and cross the finish line together.

As required by law, the EPA will issue its own final standards on the delta's water quality on schedule —

significantly revised from the preliminary standards announced a year ago. It is vitally important to California's economic revival, as well as to the restoration of estuarine habitat, that the state simultaneously adopt its own, equivalent water-quality standards.

It would be hard to overstate the impor-

tance of ending the gridlock that has prevented a solution to the delta's deterioration for almost 20 years. That gridlock has resulted in great uncertainty over annual water supplies, making it difficult for farmers to secure loans, for cities to plan for development, for businesses to plan expansions — and for fish to survive.

**I**ndeed, stability of water supplies is almost as important as quantity, and a federal-state agreement on standards is the only way to guarantee it. Without it, water supplies will continue to be determined according to the ever-changing demands of the federal Endangered Species Act.

By all accounts, the state and the federal agencies have narrowed their differences dramatically. The final decision, which is ultimately up to Governor Wilson, may be more political than technical.

The question is whether the governor will seize on the remaining differences to block agreement and thereby gain another cudgel, like immigration, with which to batter the Clinton administration; or whether he will act in the state's economic and environmental interests by bringing this contentious and costly dispute to closure. We strongly urge him to do the latter.