

FACT SHEET: STAKEHOLDER PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE DELTA REGIONAL MONITORING PROGRAM

The Problem: A diverse array of agencies and other entities monitor water quality, flows, and ecological conditions in the Delta. However, under the current monitoring framework, our ability to develop an integrated assessment of water quality in the Delta is limited by a number of factors, including variability in the level of assessment, reporting, and access to the data among these programs. A lack of coordination between existing monitoring programs also exists, which may result in inefficiencies and duplication of effort. In addition, there is a general recognition that significant data gaps exist, notably with respect to contaminants. For example, the sporadic nature by which contaminants monitoring has and continues to be conducted impedes our ability to ascertain baseline conditions, compare against such conditions, and answer core questions about the status of and trends in beneficial uses. Water quality concerns in the Delta related to the decline of pelagic organisms, wastewater treatment plant discharges, agricultural discharges, pesticides, and unknown toxicity events all highlight the need for a well-coordinated monitoring program, in which data are synthesized, comprehensively assessed, and reported on a regular basis.

The Scope: The State Water Board and Central Valley Regional Water Board have initiated an effort to develop the Delta Regional Monitoring Program (Delta RMP). Development of a comprehensive monitoring program for the Delta was identified as a priority action in the Strategic Workplan for Activities in the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary, which was adopted by the State Water Board, Central Valley Regional Water Board, and San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board (collectively Water Boards) in 2008.

Development of the Delta RMP is expected to proceed in a phased approach. The first phase of the program development (pilot phase) will focus on three objectives:

1. Develop capabilities for regularly compiling, synthesizing, and reporting data from existing, ongoing monitoring efforts,
2. Build interest, involvement, and momentum by answering important questions that require a comprehensive, regional view, and
3. Use this effort as a proof of concept that sets the stage and creates capabilities and recommended approaches needed for an integrated, coordinated RMP that is capable of informing environmental management program and policy decisions.

Phase II will have the purpose of defining the long-term structure and goals of the Delta RMP. We expect that the long-term program will strive for integration across different programs based on the results of the pilot phase.

Water Boards staff recognize that stakeholder involvement and coordination are critical to the success of the Delta RMP effort. In addition to stakeholder coordination, this project will need to be closely coordinated with other similar, ongoing efforts such as the CALFED Science Program's project to develop a strategy for Delta monitoring, assessment and research; the Sacramento River Watershed Program's pilot project to develop a regional monitoring program; and the US EPA's efforts to develop a monitoring directory and strategy for monitoring in the San Joaquin River basin.

Process-to-date: On 30 September 2008, Central Valley Regional Water Board staff held a stakeholder kick-off meeting to provide an overview of the impetus for the Delta RMP planning effort, obtain stakeholder input, gauge stakeholder endorsement of and commitment to this process, and begin a process designed to foster stakeholder participation in the development of the Delta RMP. One outcome of this meeting was the formation of stakeholder working groups to plan various aspects of the RMP framework: governance, monitoring questions, data integration, funding, and coordination among other programs. The meeting notes, sign-in sheet, invitation, agenda, and presentations are available at the project website (http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/delta_water_quality/comprehensive_monitoring_program/index.shtml).

The first Governance Working Group Meeting was held on 20 November 2008. The purpose of this meeting was to obtain stakeholder input regarding governance options for the pilot phase of the Delta RMP. During the meeting, stakeholders reviewed a governance strawman proposal developed by the project planning team¹, which outlined options for organization lead, program organization, stakeholder participation, and degree of formality. The meeting notes and materials are available at the project website. The meeting participants felt their input would be better informed once two products were available for review: 1) the contaminants synthesis report that UC Davis researchers are preparing and 2) the report summarizing existing water quality monitoring in the Delta that Aquatic Science Center (ASC)² is preparing. Both reports are slated for public distribution in early 2009, at which time the Water Boards will schedule a subsequent stakeholder meeting to further discuss governance and initiate discussion of the monitoring questions and indicators. In the meantime, the planning team will produce strawman proposals for the other topics identified at the stakeholder kick-off meeting. These will be made available at the link above as they are developed.

Q1: Who should participate in the RMP development?

A1: The stakeholder process is open to all interested parties. The key stakeholders for this effort include all groups that either generate or depend on water quality data related to protecting and restoring the biological, physical, and chemical integrity of water, including water rights decisions. This includes, but is not limited to, state and federal agencies; water agencies, districts, and contractors; wastewater dischargers; stormwater dischargers; reclamation districts; agricultural dischargers; dredging operations; environmental organizations; and other regional monitoring program efforts.

Management-level representatives from these stakeholder groups were invited to participate in an expert stakeholder panel kick-off meeting. They were also asked to designate a “deputy” who would participate in continuing working meetings.

¹ Water Boards project staff, Aquatic Science Center, and Dr. Brock Bernstein

² The ASC is a Joint Powers Agency with representation from the State, San Francisco Bay, and Central Valley Water Board, the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It was created to promote and deliver science support functions and information management for governmental and non-governmental organizations with roles in water quality protection, policy development, and assessment. ASC is staffed and managed by the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI).

Q2: What is asked from participating stakeholders?

A2: Stakeholders are asked to assist the Water Boards in developing the goals, objectives, scope and strategy for a sustainable Delta RMP. Participation can be accomplished through any number of ways, including providing input via attendance at project-related meetings, electronic submittals, and/or other means; and assisting with information gathering efforts. We welcome whatever level of participation you can offer.

Q3: How is the stakeholder process expected to work?

A3: The stakeholder process has several components: 1) Water Board and ASC staff will coordinate with issue-oriented stakeholder workgroups, 2) Regional Water Board staff are scheduling one-on-one stakeholder interviews to obtain more in-depth input and maximize the RMP's utility for a wide range of stakeholder interests, 3) Regional Water Board staff will give project updates in meetings with representative stakeholder groups (CALFED, irrigation districts, POTWs³, Interagency Ecological Program [IEP], etc), and 4) the Water Boards will hold a “roll-out” workshop, similar in format to the kick-off meeting, to promote and publicize the Delta RMP effort.

Stakeholder workgroups. A product-oriented participatory process will be utilized to help prepare products and encourage participation in the RMP development. As determined at the kick-off meeting (30 September 2008), stakeholder workgroups will assist the Water Boards with developing the Delta RMP. Participation in the workgroups is open to all interested parties.

The workgroups are charged with shaping a long-term RMP that meets regional monitoring priorities and needs, is technically sound, and can be implemented with existing resources. Workgroups will help refine initial goals, objectives and strategy and resolve specific implementation issues.

Workgroup participation by key stakeholders is strongly suggested but not mandated. At the kick-off meeting, participants identified five initial workgroup topics to focus on and had an opportunity to sign up by topic:

- Governance
- Monitoring Questions
- Data Integration
- Funding
- Coordination With Other Programs

The workgroups, aided by the Delta RMP planning team, will need to address, at a minimum:

- a. Interim and long-term scope of the program, including priority beneficial uses, parameters and benchmarks for assessing the priority beneficial uses, and the geographic and temporal scope;
- b. Viable mechanisms for compiling, assessing, and regularly reporting results; and

³ Publicly owned treatment works.

- c. Products (e.g., reports, recommendations, program reviews, etc.) and distribution frequency.

Workgroup coordination. The Delta RMP planning team will coordinate the workgroups and make strawman proposals and other work materials available for review and comment. Based on workgroup input, the project planning team will prepare a document describing a strategy for regional monitoring and governance options. Stakeholder participation during implementation will depend on the preferred option. Regional Water Board staff will distribute monthly project updates that describe project activities and related progress by email and through the project website.

One-on-one interviews. Regional Water Board staff are scheduling one-on-one interviews with key water quality monitoring stakeholders to identify priorities, needs, interests, concerns and potential involvement. Interview results will be assembled for consideration by the planning team to guide the RMP development, scope for workgroups, and the content of the first synthesis report.

Presentations and meetings. We will schedule meetings with the larger stakeholder group to provide updates regarding working group products and general direction of planning efforts. We will also arrange follow-up meetings with representative stakeholder groups (e.g., Irrigated Lands Coalitions, POTWs, major industries, etc.) to promote and publicize the Delta RMP effort.

“Roll-out” Workshop. The Water Boards will plan and hold a “roll-out” workshop, similar in format to the kick-off meeting, which will mark the start of the Delta RMP pilot phase. Workshop materials (including agenda, announcements and technical documents) will be prepared and distributed. Results of the “roll-out” workshop will be summarized and distributed to participants and other target groups. Follow-up interviews may be conducted with participants, as needed. Content and format of the workshop will be determined in consultation with key monitoring agencies and interested parties. Potential workshop topics include management priorities and monitoring objectives, monitoring gaps/overlaps, and implementation (e.g., institutional needs, funding, policy issues and related constraints).

Q4: Where are the meetings?

A4: Unless decided otherwise, all meetings will be held at the offices of the Central Valley Regional Water Board. The address is 11020 Sun Center Drive, Suite 200, Rancho Cordova, California 95670-6114.

Q5: What is the timeframe?

A5: The initial program plan is expected to be completed by December 2009. Milestones in the program plan development include:

1. Monthly project updates;
2. Starting stakeholder workgroups (November 2008);
3. One-on-one stakeholder interviews (beginning December 2008);
4. Contaminants synthesis report (March 2009);

5. Summary report of existing Delta water quality monitoring programs (March 2009);
6. Summary report of interview results (1 month after last interview);
7. Strategy and alternatives report that addresses the interim and long-term scope of the program; processes for managing, compiling, assessing, and regular reporting of results; and products and distribution frequency; and describes options for the structure and administration of the short-term assessment and reporting framework and long-term Delta RMP (July 2009);
8. Present options and associated resource needs for the Water Boards' consideration (September – December 2009); and
9. "Roll-out" workshop: partnership-building for monitoring program implementation (September 2009 – December 2009).

Q6: Where can I get more information?

A6: Visit the Regional Water Board's website at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/delta_water_quality/comprehensive_monitoring_program/index.shtml

Subscribe to the Delta Water Quality Issues listserv at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/reg5_subscribe.shtml

Q7: Is there someone to talk to?

A7: For more information, contact Karen Larsen at (916) 464-4646 or by email at klarsen@waterboards.ca.gov.