



California Water Quality Monitoring Council



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Sent via email to DeltaPlanComment@deltacouncil.ca.gov

SUBJECT: DRAFT DELTA PLAN – INCREASED COORDINATION IS NEEDED FOR SUCCESSFUL ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION AND EXISTING TOOLS SHOULD BE THE STARTING POINT

Successful implementation of the Delta Plan, including adaptively managing 80,000 acres of habitat restoration, will require increased coordination between governmental and non-governmental agencies, and organizations that monitor and assess the delta's water quality and aquatic resources. Success will require improved availability of the data and information that results from these efforts. Fortunately, the Delta Science Program will not need to initiate this coordination. An existing organization, the California Water Quality Monitoring Council, has been mandated to address these deficiencies by the legislature, the California Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Natural Resources Agency. The Monitoring Council's solution to improve water quality and aquatic ecosystem monitoring, assessment, and reporting, contained in our [Comprehensive Monitoring Program Strategy for California](#), is already being implemented for wetlands, and is being developed for estuaries. Integration with these existing efforts should be reflected in the Delta Plan.

Multiple pieces of legislation enacted in recent years recognize the existing lack of coordination between organizations that monitor, assess, and report on water quality and the health of our aquatic resources. Differences in monitoring objectives, data collection methods, assessment strategies, and data management make it difficult or impossible to bring these data together so as to develop a clear picture of the status of our aquatic resources, related public health and welfare issues, and the effectiveness of agency programs to manage our aquatic resources. Successful Delta Plan implementation depends on addressing these deficiencies.

The San Francisco Bay-Delta is the state's largest and most important estuary. Many state, federal and local agencies, regulated dischargers, and water bond grant recipients spend millions of dollars each year monitoring, assessing and reporting on the condition of the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary ecosystem. While some coordination efforts currently exist—including the Interagency Ecological Program (IEP, since 1970), the San Francisco Bay Regional

Monitoring Program (Bay RMP, since 1993) and an emerging Delta RMP—there is currently no overall structure to coordinate all of these activities nor a universally agreed upon way to integrate the data and information gained from these activities into a coherent ecosystem health assessment. At present, the specific mandates of each agency/organization result in inconsistent monitoring objectives and methods to collect, assess, and manage the data, making it difficult to integrate data from different studies and sources. What is more, there is no single user-friendly place to access the data.

SB 1070 (Kehoe, 2006) calls on both governmental and non-governmental organizations that monitor water quality and associated ecosystem health to collaborate in their monitoring and assessment activities and to make the resulting information available to decision-makers and the public via the internet. Pursuant to this legislation Cal/EPA and the Natural Resources Agency adopted a Memorandum of Understanding establishing the California Water Quality Monitoring Council and tasking that organization with developing a strategy to address the problems cited in the legislation. The Monitoring Council's approach, as outlined in their December 2010 [Comprehensive Monitoring Program Strategy for California](#), focuses first on providing a platform for intuitive, streamlined access to water quality and ecosystem health information the directly addresses users' questions. This approach includes a number of key features:

- A decentralized organizational structure of theme-specific workgroups that operate within common policies and guidelines defined by the Monitoring Council to develop a complete set of theme-based internet portals
- A single, global point of entry to monitoring data and assessment information – the My Water Quality website (www.CaWaterQuality.net)
- A set of monitoring program performance measures which each issue-specific workgroup will use to design, evaluate, coordinate, and enhance monitoring, assessment, and reporting efforts
- Coordination of monitoring and assessment methods that achieves an appropriate balance between statewide consistency and regional flexibility
- Decentralized data management practices that maintain data as close as possible to its place of origin so as to ensure continued high quality, but providing data exchange mechanisms that allow increased access and the combining of data from multiple sources

To date, a number of theme-specific workgroups and portals have been created, including the themes of swimming safety, safety of eating fish and shellfish, and wetland ecosystem health. Additional workgroups are forming or planned to address ocean ecosystem health, drinking water safety, and the health of streams and rivers. Their efforts clearly demonstrate that the Monitoring Council's vision is, in deed, correct.

As an example, the California Wetland Monitoring Workgroup has been aggressively working to standardize wetland mapping and assessment methods among twenty five local, state and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations. Their strategy, [Tenets of a State Wetland and Riparian Area Monitoring Program](#), was endorsed by the Monitoring Council last year. Included in their strategy are standard tools for mapping wetland extent, rapid assessment methods for assessing the condition of wetlands (California Rapid Assessment Method or CRAM), and the Wetland Tracker data management system to record wetland extent and condition information as well as wetland restoration projects. Their California Wetland Portal (www.CaliforniaWetlands.net) makes all of this information available to agency decision

makers and the public. The California Wetland Monitoring Workgroup and their California Wetland Portal are well developed, and can greatly assist with tracking the wetland restoration proposed in the Delta Plan.

As demonstrated by the Monitoring Council and its theme-specific workgroups, greater efficiency and effectiveness can be achieved through integration of existing programs and coordination efforts. In its [Comprehensive Monitoring Program Strategy for California](#), the Monitoring Council has already identified the need for a California Estuaries portal and an underlying workgroup devoted to the health of California estuarine ecosystems. The San Francisco Bay Regional Monitoring Program, the Delta Regional Monitoring Program, the Interagency Ecological Program, and the State and Federal Contractors Water Agency have agreed in principle to form the California Estuary Monitoring Workgroup that will develop a California Estuaries internet portal initially focusing on the health of the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary. This workgroup, sponsored by the Monitoring Council, is tasked with identifying key questions to assess the ecological health of the San Francisco Estuary, the data and methods available and needed to address the questions, and the methods to access, display, and work with the data and information through a new California Estuaries Portal, linked from the My Water Quality website. In the process, this workgroup would also identify redundancies, data gaps and inefficiencies in current monitoring and assessment activities and develop solutions for improvement. Finally, this workgroup will interact with other Monitoring Council workgroups to gain access to additional data, information and tools so as to permit even more comprehensive assessments of water quality and ecosystem health in California. This would be an ideal group to assist with the tracking of performance measures related to water quality and ecosystem restoration in the Delta.

The benefits to the Delta Stewardship Council by integrating with the Monitoring Council include:

- Deliver answers to the public about our water quality and aquatic ecosystems in a manner easy to understand
- Highlight and help to prioritize efforts to improve monitoring and assessment programs by revealing where data gaps, ineffective monitoring designs, lack of assessment tools, poor data integration, and other problems hamper statewide assessment and effective decision making
- Provide the opportunity to highlight the important work of the agencies and organizations involved
- Permit broader-based assessments than were previously possible
- Automate the annual reporting efforts of governmental organizations by focusing on meaningful environmental outcomes
- Lower costs from improved coordination of monitoring and assessment, reduced duplication of efforts, and easier access to data and products

The California Water Quality Monitoring Council urges that the Delta Stewardship Council through the Delta Science Program become a key player in the efforts of the California Wetland Monitoring Workgroup and the California Estuary Monitoring Workgroup, and that the Monitoring Council's approach to improved monitoring, assessment, and reporting efforts be incorporated into the Delta Plan.

To discuss these issues further, please contact Jonathan Bishop at (916) 341-5820 or jsbishop@waterboards.ca.gov or Dale Hoffman-Floerke at (916) 653-8045 or dalehf@water.ca.gov. To schedule a briefing on the Monitoring Council and its theme-specific workgroups for the Delta Stewardship Council, the Independent Science Board, or the Delta Science Program, please contact Monitoring Council Coordinator Jon B. Marshack at (916) 341-5514 or jmarshack@waterboards.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



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State Water Resources Control Board
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Representing Cal/EPA



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cc: Members of the California Water Quality Monitoring Council
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John Laird, Secretary for Natural Resources