

Briefing Statement

From: Delta Smelt Working Group

To: Environmental Water Account Implementing Agency Managers

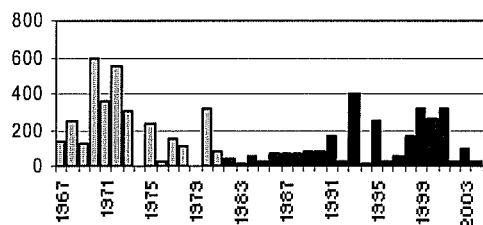
Date: October 25, 2005

Re: 2005 Recovery Index for Delta Smelt

Problem:

The 2005 Recovery Index for delta smelt is 4, the lowest index on record. This is substantially lower than recent recovery indices of 25 (2004), 101 (2003), 33 (2002), 314 (2001) and 265 (2000). The Recovery Index is calculated from a subset of stations from the California Department of Fish and Game's Fall Mid-Water Trawl survey. It reflects the relative abundance of late-juvenile lifestage delta smelt in September and October, before they begin to move toward their spawning areas.

	Recovery Index		
	Median	Min	Max
Pre-1982	239	22	589
Post-1982	69	4	400



This very low Recovery Index represents a very high concern for the Delta Smelt Working Group. For water year 2006 the Concern Level (the cumulative total of pre-spawning adults taken by the SWP and CVP between December 1 and March 31), which is calculated from the Recovery Index, is 143 fish; for water year 2005 the concern level was 892. Exceeding the concern level does not automatically prescribe a change in Project operations to reduce incidental take, but triggers a meeting of the Delta Smelt Working Group, who will review all available data on delta smelt abundance and distribution and monitoring data on Delta conditions to formulate a recommendation as to whether or not a change in Project operations is warranted.

Key Issues:

Abundance of delta smelt is at an all-time low. A preliminary analysis of salvage at the SWP and CVP as part of the Pelagic Organisms Decline study indicates that recently the incidental take of pre-spawning adults has increased compared to previous years; the population effect of this increase is unclear but is a priority for study. Also, new information indicates that fecundity rates among wild delta smelt are significantly less than among captive populations (Bennett, unpublished data). For these reasons, protection of pre-spawning adults will be a high priority for the Delta Smelt Working Group in WY 2006.

Management Implications:

Because concern for the continued existence of delta smelt is high, the Delta Smelt Working Group will likely need to meet frequently, to monitor Delta conditions and the distribution of delta smelt carefully, and keep agency management abreast of all relevant information. The Working Group encourages agency managers to consider the urgency of the situation when reviewing recommendations from the Working Group, and to respond as quickly as possible.