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SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

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Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the decline of our salmon fisheries on the West Coast. I will also discuss the dramatically changed landscape of ecosystem investment and operations of the Federal Central Valley Project (CVP) since the last major drought to hit California and the Central Valley Project Improvement Act was passed by Congress 15 years ago.

There is no question about the dramatic decline in returning salmon spawners in the Sacramento River as determined by the National Marine Fisheries Service. There is, however, some uncertainty about the driving forces behind the decline. Attached to my testimony is a paper prepared by National Marine Fisheries Service scientists that identifies “ocean conditions” as the primary common factor behind this disaster (attachment #1). This widespread disaster that has hit the largest river systems to the smallest streams that flow directly in to the ocean up and down the West Coast. Some feel passionately that water project development and in particular the delta export pumps are THE cause for the salmon decline. I respect their right to have an opinion, but disagree with their conclusions. The huge body of science and data that relates to this tragedy, and the delta in particular, simply does not support this conclusion. Attachment 2 is a graph that shows the relative quantities of water diverted from the delta system.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is the focus of a number of significant planning processes that start with the recognition that the Delta is broken from many perspectives. Fisheries are in decline, water supplies that move through it for the people and farms of California are inadequate and unreliable, water quality issues persist, a major earthquake induced collapse is quite likely, and the ecosystem has become dominated by invasive species – some of which are harmful to the food chain and native fisheries.

Ecosystem Investment

Since 1992, when Congress passed the Central Valley Project Improvement Act a significant amount of change has occurred for the farmers on 3 million acres of irrigated land served by the project, the five million household served by the project and the aquatic ecosystem. These changes and investments have coincided with significant investments by the CALFED process and significant changes in the regulatory environment.

In the last fifteen years:

- Over \$1 billion has been invested in habitat improvements – primarily focused on salmon stressors.
- Over \$200 million has been spent on scientific research and monitoring.
- Over 46,000,000 acre feet of water from the CVP has been prioritized for fishery improvements. That is about 3.1 million acre feet of water annually that is no longer reliably available to support food production or communities.
- Over \$200 million has been spent on the Environmental Water Account for the benefit of the fisheries.
- CVP water and power contractors have contributed nearly \$460,000,000 to support these environmental restoration efforts.

At the same time:

- The 32 water districts from the CVP that receive water south from the Delta have regularly faced 40% water supply reductions, even in wet years.
- This year the CVP faces a 55% shortage and the State Water Project (SWP), which serves 20 million Californians, has a 65% shortage.

In Westlands Water District:

- 100,000 acres have been taken out of irrigated agriculture.
- Cropping patterns have shifted in response to water shortages and higher water costs. Over 100,000 acres of the 600,000 acres in the district are now in vegetables and nearly 100,000 acres are planted to permanent crops-primarily almonds.
- This year our farmers will pay about \$100 per acre foot for their water from the CVP.

I provide this detail to demonstrate the commitments of the farmers, the agencies and the regulators to be responsive to the fishery concerns we have. There is also a widely held belief that we have ignored or done much too little to address the “other stressors” in the Delta impacting our fisheries. Too few resources have been focused on invasive species, the changing food chain and declining nutrients, and toxics, in particular ammonia from urban sewer discharges that surround the Delta, introduced predators, and some 2,000 unscreened and unmonitored water diversions with a combined capacity that exceeds the CVP.

Broken Delta:

I have attached to my testimony the “articulation table” (attachment #3) that shows the many processes addressing the challenges we face in the Delta. Of these, the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and the Governor’s Delta Vision process deserve your notice. Two common realities pervade all of these processes: 1) A recognition that the status quo cannot and will not stand and that we face a choice: either we take action to

address the ecosystem and water management infrastructure problems or the system will collapse and we will move directly into an environmental and economic disaster; and 2) The existing means of conveying project water through the southern delta needs to be changed for a variety of reasons and a canal around the Delta should be built to a location that can support an effective screen for separating the water for 25 million Californians and 3 million acres of farm land from the fish in the Delta.

In the BDCP process, the water and environmental interests are working with the Federal and State fishery and Water Project agencies to develop a comprehensive habitat conservation plan. This planning effort will identify conservation measures that can be counted on to put the listed species on the road to recovery. It is a complex and intense undertaking, one that is driven by our common needs to address our water and environmental problems.

Science in the Delta

The Delta suffers from complex scientific and historic political conflicts. This is an area for which we have a tremendous amount of scientific data and completed research. However, just looking at the conflict over the causes of the salmon decline, you quickly get the picture that different people draw different conclusions from the same data. This conflict spills over to the Biological Opinions which guide and restrict the operations of the CVP and SWP.

We must and will live with these conflicts as we attempt to find common ground and make decisions that will assure that future generations can enjoy a healthy ecosystem and a robust economy.

Conclusion

The federal interest in sustaining our fisheries, farms, and communities is enormous. As usual, we all struggle with the competing societal values when it comes to the intersection of our water management responsibilities and our desire to promote healthy fisheries and ecosystems. As our conflicts will be on-going, it is essential that we keep our eyes on and resources properly focused on all of the stressors, all the causes of problems and not make the error of a narrow minded focus that fails to look at the whole picture-at the totality of the problems we face.