

## **Water solution must work for all**

Earlier this month, the Legislature tried to hammer out a comprehensive plan to address the State's complex and long-standing water issues. Many diverse voices of protest said the solution must address the entire web of complicated issues. When the package of bills didn't, it failed.

When the Legislature brings this same flawed plan back up for debate, and they will very soon, the new effort must truly be for a solution that works for all.

California does not need another sad example of pitting state government against local government, one region against another, or rural against urban interests. Voters will recall the bitterness of the "us" versus "them" conflict from past renditions of a state water project, infamously known as the "Peripheral Canal". If the Legislature once again attempts to put the needs of water exporters and narrow environmental objectives ahead of preserving the Delta and Bays, then California's sad history of water management gridlock will repeat itself.

Conversely, if reasonable voices prevail, all of California wins.

The Delta Counties Coalition – a consortium of Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano and Yolo counties – was formed to be one of those reasonable voices.

The Coalition knows change must happen to protect the fragile Delta ecosystem and provide more reliability to water exports, but that change must also be managed to protect the water quality, economic, social and recreational aspects of the entire region.

Abandoning the historic communities and agricultural bounty of the Delta, as some have proposed, to meet one set of environmental goals will have a ripple effect that harms other environmental concerns for our Bay area. Failed levees in the Delta will drastically alter water quality in the Suisun Marsh and San Francisco Bay, unraveling years of hard work to protect and restore this nationally important estuary.

The proposed Delta Plan cannot be managed by people with only statewide interests in mind, with no obligation to weigh or mitigate the impact of their decisions on the economic, social and recreational fabric of the Delta. After all, it is the Delta – contained within our counties and home to 4 million people – that will ultimately change from these proposed water supply and ecosystem solutions. It only seems reasonable that local representatives be an integral and significant part of the planning process and the ongoing governance.

Then, there is the issue of who pays. It is only reasonable to expect that those who benefit from a state water project should pay the freight to move water to where it is needed. It is also reasonable that those who benefit will mitigate the environmental and economic damages of their projects. Digging a ditch the width of the Panama Canal through the heart of the Delta will devastate farms and communities. In addition, some of the proposed environmental solutions will convert tens of thousands of acres of working farms into new, unmanaged habitat. The economic survival of California's productive farmland is not just a state issue, but a national issue as half of the nation's fruits and vegetables are grown here.

Together these actions will abruptly change local economies, displace the stakeholders who monitor the levees and noxious weeds, and decimate the tax revenues that local governments (including water agencies, reclamation districts, mosquito abatement districts, cities, and counties) rely on to provide essential services.

The Delta Counties Coalition has insisted that any workable solution must truly work for all Californians, has provided the Legislature and Administration with significant ideas for a better way to address the State's water problems, and has proposed principles for the basis of successful water legislation. We have also stressed that any solution that doesn't protect the Delta – as a community and not just as an ecosystem or plumbing fixture – is not viable.

One-sided perspectives cannot shape the state's water policy, nor does it have to foretell unending conflict as California's future. Reasonable solutions are possible.

Sincerely,

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