

Stockton Record

WE MUST AVOID DELTA DISASTER

By **Bill Jennings**

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Jerry Meral, Gov. Jerry Brown's point man to build the peripheral tunnels, scolds The Record for its April 18 editorial, "Wishful thinking on the Delta," for assuming that the Bay Delta Conservation Plan's proposed tunnels under the Delta would continually divert 9,000 cubic-feet-per-second around the estuary. Meral claims in his May 19 op-ed piece, "Clarifying issues with Bay Delta Conservation Plan," that "No additional water withdrawal from the Delta is being sought under the application for this permit."

Nonsense.

Present restrictions limit average annual exports to about 4.8 million acre-feet and the peripheral tunnels could almost double export capacity. The state and federal water contractors aren't going to pay \$18 billion for project construction and operation and \$50 billion or more, including financing costs, if they don't get more water. The increase in cost per unit of water would undermine their economic viability and be a political nightmare to try and sell to their customers.

Speculative risks to the export delivery system from potential earthquakes, floods and sea level rise can be virtually eliminated by spending \$2 billion or more to transform existing Delta levees into Dutch-like super levees. This would protect not only the water delivery system but also the people, farms and communities of the Delta, which tunnels alone will not accomplish.

Nor would building the tunnels and adding a point of diversion in the North Delta reduce fish losses or immunize the export projects from restrictions of the Endangered Species Act. The problem isn't only where the water is diverted but also how much water is taken from the Delta. Upwards of half the water will still be diverted from the present facilities, and the BDCP explicitly rejects constructing new state-of-the-art fish screens in the south Delta.

The Delta's ecological fabric is hemorrhaging because no estuary in the world has been deprived of more than half its historic flow and survived. Restoration depends upon the Delta receiving more water, not less.

The California Legislature, in the 2009 Delta Reform Act, directed the State

Water Resources Control Board and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to undertake public proceedings to determine how much water the Delta needed. The agencies gathered together resource and water agencies, academia, independent scientists, as well as water users and public interest groups.

Following separate extensive public proceedings, the two agencies issued their findings and conclusions in two 2010 reports that found that substantial increases in Delta outflow and a return to a more natural hydrograph were critically necessary to protect the public trust resources of the Delta. Meral and the water exporters are ignoring those reports in their quest to divert the Sacramento River under the Delta because increased outflow threatens exports.

Meral suggests that surely The Record could support the 136,723 jobs that would be created. Actually, that is an absurdly low number of about six jobs per \$1 million. Economists point out that investment in conservation, reclamation and reuse would create 10 to 20 jobs per \$1 million and create millions of acre-feet of new water to reduce demands for Delta water.

California is in a water crisis and the Delta's environmental tapestry is collapsing because the broad suit of laws enacted to allocate water and protect fisheries has long been ignored. Now, those responsible for creating and chaperoning this crisis ask us to trust them in an elaborate scheme to increase exports under the guise of restoration.

If approved, the BDCP would be a disaster for the fisheries, farms and communities of the Delta. It would be a death sentence for one of the world's great estuaries.

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