



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **ACWA Issues Statement on Delta Smelt Biological Opinion**

*Stage Set for Dire Water Supply Impacts, Possible Conflicts with Other Species*

**Sacramento** – Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) Executive Director Timothy Quinn issued the following statement today on a new biological opinion for Delta smelt. U.S. District Court Judge Oliver Wanger ruled in 2007 that the previous opinion was inadequate, and ordered state and federal fish agencies to issue a revised one by today. The opinion, which forms the basis for new operating rules for the State Water Project and federal Central Valley Project, could result in permanent restrictions on water deliveries through the Delta, reducing deliveries by up to 50% in some years. The projects serve more than 25 million Californians and millions of acres of farmland.

“All Californians should be deeply concerned about the decision regarding Delta smelt announced today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The decision will have tremendous impacts for 25 million people in the Bay Area, Central California and Southern California, with no guarantee that the fish and the ecosystem will benefit.

“Last month, a group of thoughtful Californians released a Delta Vision Strategic Plan that called for comprehensive water policies based on the co-equal goals of ecosystem health and a reliable water supply. Today’s action demonstrates how far we are from achieving those co-equal goals.

“This decision focuses on a single species when, instead, we need to focus on the entire ecosystem. It regulates only water project operations when the science clearly indicates that other stressors – including exotic species, land uses and pollution – play a major role in the demise of the aquatic ecosystem. Further, this decision will do nothing to solve the underlying structural causes of the conflict between the needs of the aquatic environment and the state’s water system.

“The benefits to Delta smelt are highly speculative because of the very limited approach being taken. What is not speculative, however, is the very real impact on our economy these actions will have. This will certainly add to on-farm jobs losses, push additional businesses into failure, and further burden our urban and agricultural economy at a time when the state and the nation are in an economic tailspin.

“What’s happening here is a single-species, single-stressor approach using half-century-old infrastructure that pits species protection against the California economy – all under the control of a federal judge. It’s an approach inherited from the past, and frankly we need new leadership.

“It should be apparent to everyone that we are on the wrong train. This single-species, single-stressor train left the station decades ago and has yet to produce satisfactory results for any species or our long-term water supply reliability. There is no reason to think the next round of narrowly focused actions will be any more beneficial for fish than the last one – and we know it’s more bad news for water supplies and the state and national economy. This week it is Delta smelt, last week it was longfin smelt, and in a few months it will be the salmon. The requirements of these decisions will almost certainly be in conflict with each other, and everything will be in conflict with a healthy economy.

“The only way forward is to get off this train and board a new one with the right destination – a comprehensive approach that focuses on the ecosystem and a portfolio of solutions, including actions to address all stressors and structural improvements in the water supply system, including conveyance and storage, to reduce conflict between the aquatic environment and water supply reliability. We need to move, on an urgency basis, to adopt such a comprehensive approach that can work for the environment and our economy.

“This must be a priority for the new administration in Washington, D.C. Every day we stay on the wrong train is another day of further ecosystem decline and lost water supplies.”

*ACWA is a statewide association of public agencies whose 450 members are responsible for about 90% of the water delivered in California. For more information, visit [www.acwa.com](http://www.acwa.com).*

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