

# Panel calls Delta recovery plan woefully incomplete

*Questions remain despite four years, \$140 million in research on estuary*

**Mike Taugher, Bay Area News Group, 12-9-10**

SAN FRANCISCO -- A national panel of experts appeared frustrated Wednesday by gaping holes in a developing master plan for the Delta despite four years and \$140 million in studies.

The report provided the committee no straightforward description of the recovery goals for the Delta ecosystem, no analysis of water demands compared to available supplies and, perhaps most troubling, portions of an ongoing study on the environmental effects of the proposal were described as woefully incomplete.

How can the panel review the science behind the plan, asked Denise Reed of the University of New Orleans, when the analysis provided contains "no depth, frankly?"

The National Academy of Sciences panel has been reviewing new environmental regulations, water supply and ecosystem problems in the Delta for about a year.

Next fall, the group is set to release its final report that will analyze the Delta's environmental problems and provide recommendations for moving toward solutions.

The reviews were triggered by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, acting at the request of Kern County water and farming magnate Stewart Resnick, to review new restrictions on Delta pumping.

But a public session Wednesday focused largely on a more recent assignment, scheduled to be done in April, that involves evaluating the science used in the Bay Delta Conservation Plan.

The plan would move Sacramento River water by canal or tunnels to the south as part of a sweeping strategy to restore the West Coast's largest estuary. Its cost would exceed \$11 billion.

Supporters hope it will lead to the recovery of declining fish species and stable water supplies. But it is facing growing questions about its viability. Can the conservation plan provide enough water to make it financially worthwhile for water districts, or does significantly more water need to flow into San Francisco Bay to help fish?

Despite the lack of answers to basic questions the panel had, Peltier said that after more than 100 meetings and \$140 million, it was time to make decisions.

"We have to make decisions with the science we have," Peltier said.

But Reed, echoing a number of colleagues who expressed dismay at the lack of answers to basic questions, asked how the committee could meet its charge to evaluate science when, "frankly, it hasn't been provided."