CALIFORNIA BAY-DELTA MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING AMONG FEDERAL AGENCIES AND PUBLIC HEARING

Issue: The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is spearheading the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will reestablish the Federal Government's leadership role in Sacramento/San Joaquin River Delta-San Francisco Bay estuary (Bay-Delta) matters.

- The EPA Administrator is expected to sign the MOU on Monday, September 28, 2009. The MOU will be announced at a public meeting on September 30.
- Other signatories are: Department of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Jo Ellen Darcy, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, and CEQ Chairwoman Nancy Sutley.
- The public meeting will be chaired by Secretary Salazar at Department of the Interior (DOI) in Washington, D.C. Members of California's Congressional delegation will attend and may give remarks. Other federal agency officials are expected to be present but not give remarks.
- The MOU establishes a federal Bay-Delta Leadership Committee (co-chaired by DOI and CEQ with signatory agencies'participation) and commits the agencies to developing a coordinated federal work plan, by December 15, 2009, outlining near term actions that federal agencies will take on Bay-Delta issues.
- The MOU itself is largely process oriented and does not commit EPA to any specific substantive actions, other then to help develop the workplan and implement its actions.
- A group of California stakeholders are also planning to brief key federal agencies, including EPA, next Thursday on the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and their view of the federal role.

Background:

- The MOU confirms the commitment of the federal agencies to work in partnership with the State and key stakeholders to foster a healthy and sustainable Bay Delta ecosystem. It is intended to build upon and complement the collaborative work already underway.
- The Bay-Delta is a source of drinking water for more than 22 million people and supports a $28 billion agricultural industry. It is also important habitat for fish, wildlife and waterfowl, including several threatened and endangered fish species.
- The Bay-Delta is also the hub of California's water delivery system that transports water from Northern California to agricultural and urban water users south of the Delta. Approximately 20 to 70% of natural river flow is diverted to the Central Valley and Southern California. Water that is not diverted locally flows through San Francisco Bay to the Pacific Ocean.
- Decades of environmental degradation have led to severe declines in Delta commercial and recreational fisheries, and have contributed to the collapse of the State's salmon fishing industry. Water quality threats due to increasing urbanization, flood risks posed by climate change and levee instability (e.g., from earthquakes), and competing water supply needs are added concerns.
- Currently, the State is in the third year of drought with the consequent decreased water supplies, exacerbating these problems.