

Programmatic Biological Assessment Technical Work Group Overview and Direction

Purpose and Need:

The Strategic Review Group has identified developing a programmatic biological opinion as a critical issue for the Delta LTMS. Currently, individual projects are reviewed by NMFS and USFWS and often have been time consuming and difficult on all parties due to the lack of data. Therefore, to address the lack of consolidated data related to biological resources and potential impacts from dredging and disposal within the Delta several tasks must be accomplished to formulate a programmatic Biological Assessment (BA).

Proposed Tasks:

The Work Group will need to accomplish the following components listed below before a Programmatic Biological Assessment can be written and implemented for Delta dredging projects:

- 1) *Literature Search/Review Summary Report* – A comprehensive review of existing data related to the physical and biological baseline conditions within the Study Area will be conducted and accomplished first. The participating resource agencies will provide the federally and state listed species and critical habitat in the Delta and their status. They will also provide each species life history and population dynamics. Stakeholders and other interested parties can submit pertinent information to the group for their review and inclusion in the baseline.

This baseline will be used to determine how projects may affect biological resources and physical conditions, and whether there have been significant changes in habitat values and resources compared to historical conditions. The literature search will also identify data gaps to focus additional studies such as biological surveys or water quality monitoring.

- 2) *Biological Surveys* – Data gaps for biological resources identified in the previous component will be prioritized. Once prioritized, the Work Group will present a study design specific for the biological resource identified. These will then be distributed to the SRG to seek support and funding for completion once a survey/study is completed the Work Group will review the data and integrate it into the overall BA.
- 3) *Evaluation of Impacts* - In the interim of finalizing additional studies or surveys, preliminary environmental windows could be established for species with sufficient supporting data. This approach will need to be discussed and reviewed with the resource agencies as well as other regulating agencies. Regardless of an interim approach, the final programmatic BA will evaluate the potential impacts from proposed dredging projects (e.g., maintenance

dredging) to resources and provide biological windows when dredging and disposal may occur while still providing resource protection.

In order for this Work Group to be successful, staff participation from at least one of the five core Delta LTMS agencies must occur:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Sacramento and San Francisco Districts)
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA),
- California Department of Water Resources (DWR),
- California Bay-Delta Authority (CBDA),
- Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Valley Water Board).
- The Resource Agencies: Marine National Fisheries Service; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and California Department of Fish and Game are critical participants in this process. Staff from these agencies must participate.
- Experienced staff participation and technical contributions from other agencies (state or federal) or stakeholders would be beneficial to assist completing the proposed tasks.

Participation workload:

It is anticipated that, at a minimum, the Work Group will meet once a month to collaborate on achieving the tasks specified and addressing priority of short and long-term issues pertaining to the permitting process. Work Group participants should also anticipate a minimum of 10 hours a month to review, produce, or discuss documents relevant to the regional disposal and reuse alternative deliverables listed below.

Deliverables:

The primary deliverables for this Work Group are expected to include:

- A list of species of concern, their life history and population dynamics
- An environmental baseline for the Study Area (Delta)
- Proposed additional studies
- BMP recommendations for use by the Permitting Review Work Group
- Interim environmental windows
- Final Programmatic Biological Assessment

The Work Group chair will provide monthly updates in the form of progress memos or verbal updates at the IWG and/or SRG meetings. The Science Review Panel will be asked to review this information, as appropriate.