

# California

## FARMER

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# Delta vision

**HYBRID SOLUTIONS:** California's water supply is in jeopardy unless Delta problems are approached with a new vision, according to a PPIC report. Jeffrey Mount, UC Davis professor specializing in state rivers, is one author of the report.

new ideas and new ways to think about things that are hopefully helpful."

Floods and earthquakes increasingly threaten the Delta, along with sinking land, rising sea level, regional climate change, invasive species and urbanization. And CalFed, the agency charged with solving the Delta's problems, is itself challenged by underfunding and internal dissent.

"After Hurricane Katrina, people realized that catastrophic collapse of these levees is a very real possibility," Howitt says. "This not only can happen, but almost certainly will happen. There's a 64% probability in the next 50 years."

The study says the cost of a single episode of Delta failure could reach \$40 billion. It would affect drinking water for millions of people and animals, such as the state's dairy herd, as well as irrigation water for crops and industry.

### Not freshwater system

The authors of the report challenge the long-held perception that the Delta is a naturally stable freshwater system that should be maintained. They contend the Delta in its natural state was subject to strong tidal cycles and other fluctuations in water quality. Only parts of the Delta were mostly fresh year-round; others were naturally salty.

"The belief has been that we're defending the environment by maintaining the freshwater system, but that is actually incompatible with giving the Delta's native species and ecosystem a fighting chance to survive and prosper," Hanak says. Key findings in the report include:

- Although changes will result in some significant costs and dislocations, most users of the Delta can adapt.

- Strong political and institutional leadership is needed to address the crisis. Since mid-2006, CalFed, the Delta's joint federal and state program, has been operating without independent authority or budget.

- Scientific work needs to be refocused. Levee replacement, experiments in adapting the ecosystem, flood control and island land management are key.

- Direct beneficiaries of the Delta should be primarily responsible for financing solutions.

■ **Read more about the Delta report's findings on Page 8.**

By **LEN RICHARDSON**

**V**IRTUALLY every person living in California depends on the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta for water, food, energy or transportation. While millions zoom down Interstate 80 between San Francisco and Sacramento, most don't realize they are parallel to Route 160, which winds through the state's major water source.

Unless you are a fisherman, boater or tourist visiting Al's Place in Locke, the Delta is only a headline during levee breaks. But Locke is no tourist trap, nor is it a ghost town. Chinese came to the area to construct levees and founded Locke in 1915. Like Locke, the Delta is real, with out-of-the-way charm. It also appears unstable and is deteriorating.

### Key Points

- New report considers nine alternatives for managing the Delta.
- Suggestions include a smaller peripheral canal and a restoration aqueduct.
- Authors of report say Delta cannot be maintained as a freshwater system.

### Call to action

Alarmed at the looming risk of a Delta disaster with statewide implications, the nonprofit Public Policy Institute of California has issued a call to action, written by six University of California Davis and PPIC scientists.

The 300-page report considers nine alternatives for Delta management, including a peripheral canal that is smaller than the one rejected 25 years ago and a

South Delta Restoration Aqueduct that would deliver water around the Delta to the lower San Joaquin River.

In a summary, Ellen Hanak, director of the PPIC program, writes: "The Delta is changing because of natural and human pressures. It is now up to Californians to figure out how to manage those changes, for the health of the Delta and the state as a whole."

"We hope that we'll take the political hits, and this will allow state agencies to allow their professionals to look at these alternatives," said Richard Howitt, contributing water economist and UC Davis professor, during a news conference about the report's release.

Added Jay Lund, contributing water policy expert and professor in the UC Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, "It's our job to come up with

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