

Op-ed: A sense of urgency, equality to address Delta goals
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It's a welcome sense of urgency for a state waking up to a water supply nightmare: Legislators in Sacramento are aggressively tackling a raft of bills aimed at solving the crisis in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

There are just days left in the legislative session, and time is fast running out for our representatives to get anything significant accomplished this year.

Legislators from both major political parties and both houses of our state Legislature have pledged to make water a top priority in these final days of the session as they try to hammer out legislation that not only addresses the water supply and ecosystem problems in the Delta, but also figures out how to pay for the solutions at a time when California is more fiscally strapped than ever.

At the Castaic Lake Water Agency, we are applauding the effort - cautiously.

CLWA has joined the Association of California Water Agencies and other water associations and agencies in urging legislators to keep several key principles in mind as they try to craft what may be a package of Delta legislation to be considered by the state Senate and Assembly within the next week.

First and foremost, we believe any Delta solution must recognize ecosystem restoration and water supply reliability as co-equal goals.

This recognition that both priorities warrant equal consideration is so important that we are calling on our state's elected leaders to codify the equal importance of these two goals in the legislation itself.

Some might think the goals of restoring the Delta ecosystem and ensuring a reliable supply of water from the Delta would be at odds with each other. However, we believe the exact opposite is true.

As it stands now, the Delta's future is unsustainable, either for the sake of the ecosystem or the water supply.

"Without a reliable water supply that supports and sustains a recovering economy, there is no capacity to invest in the environment," notes a joint Aug. 17 letter to key legislators from a group of major California water associations and agencies, including CLWA. "And without a robust and sustainable Delta environment there won't be reliable water supply."

California can't afford to solve one problem or the other. It must solve both.

To give one goal short shrift is to sabotage the other. The crisis has been building for years, but it's now immediate. And it's not an exaggeration to say the consequences of failure are catastrophic, with unacceptably high human, economic and environmental costs.

Over the past couple of years, California has endured the impacts of federal court decisions that fail to

recognize the co-equal nature of these two issues.

As the courts have ordered pumping from the Delta to be reduced in order to protect the Delta smelt, salmon and other fish species, they have worsened the already significant water supply impacts of a three-year drought for the 25 million residents, businesses and farms whose water supplies depend on the Delta.

This, coupled with aging and seismically vulnerable Delta infrastructure, has rendered these issues more urgent than ever.

That's why we at CLWA have endorsed the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. We believe any legislative attempt to resolve the crisis must recognize the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and facilitate it - rather than hinder it - as a key tool to addressing the technical issues in resolving the Delta crisis.

On Thursday: More on the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and its effects.

R.J. Kelly is president of the Castaic Lake Water Agency Board of Directors. His column reflects the agency's views, not necessarily those of The Signal.