A ‘Water Renaissance’ or a Water Disaster? Serious questions about the Restore the Delta water supply proposal for Southern California

Over the past 30 years, water agency professionals including engineers, biologists, and economists, have guided water agencies across the region in increasing investments in conservation, water recycling, groundwater cleanup, storage and other efforts to support stable water supplies. They have dedicated their careers to analyzing and developing the best approaches to ensuring Southern California’s communities have the water they need to thrive, balancing supply reliability with cost, climate impacts, environmental stewardship, opportunities to reduce demands and other factors.

Without a doubt, **there is absolutely a need for local supplies** as proposed by Restore the Delta, et. al. In fact, water agencies have spent billions of dollars on these efforts over the past few decades, pursuing the most cost-effective projects and programs. Our renaissance began in the early 1990s, when we began planning, innovating and diversifying our water supplies, knowing that the future would require us to do things differently.

But that doesn’t change the fact that our **imported supplies will always remain a foundation of Southern California’s water reliability**. For many reasons.

The costs of abandoning imported supplies don’t add up.

If imported supplies, including the State Water Project, Colorado River and LA Aqueduct, will no longer be relied upon for any more than 15% of the Southland supplies as proposed by Restore the Delta et. al, then…

How will water rates be impacted when water ratepayers are obligated to pay for existing facilities regardless of how much water is delivered? How does the proposal factor in the **ratepayer affordability of the ongoing costs of an underutilized infrastructure** and redundant local projects?

Who will pay for Oroville Dam? The SWP, including Lake Oroville, is critical to flood protection. Should water ratepayers continue to pay roughly $200 million annually that is required to maintain that facility that protects hundreds of thousands of people and billions of dollars in property?

Why does the proposal **artificially inflate the cost of the Delta Conveyance Project, ignoring the cost-benefit analysis prepared by the Berkeley Research Group and using the industry standards for estimating**?

And why does the proposal assume that none of the **local projects will experience inflation, delays, and overruns**? Using best available engineering estimating standards, **what are the true costs of the projects proposed in the local supply proposal**? Do Californians want to build their water portfolios using the **most expensive possible solutions**? Or do they want to balance affordability and reliability?

Stormwater capture cannot be implemented at largescale.

The proposal disregards that **most stormwater will come in a matter of days during high intensity storms** and capturing it would require vast open space that simply is not available in the built-out urban region.

With the proposed target of 600,000 acre-feet, where will stormwater capture occur? Where along the LA River would **nearly 30-100 square miles of spreading grounds be located to capture this runoff**?

Of the stormwater that is recharged, only a portion can be recovered. While this is great for groundwater basins, it **doesn't translate to 100% usable water supplies**.

Are Californians comfortable relying on rare, intermittent storms for 30% of their supply as proposed by Restore the Delta? What water quality considerations were given to **putting urban stormwater into groundwater basins** and how does this constrain the ability to extract this water for drinking water purposes? What is the decontamination cost?

Imported water is the input to recycle water.

The proposal calls for approximately 40% of all supplies to come from recycled water and a reduction of imported water to 15% of total supplies. However, due to water quality laws and regulations, only certain water supplies may be recycled and reused.

For Southern California, **the primary water sources for recycling come from imported water.**

The comparatively low salinity of the State Water Project supply makes it one of the few high-quality sources used for recycling projects. **What water would be recycled if there are not sufficient base supplies coming into the region**?

You can only conserve to a point.

Californian's have made tremendous strides in conservation. But how much more can be done? What are the **true costs of additional conservation actions** now that the low-hanging fruit has already been implemented? Many future water use efficiency efforts will be incrementally and increasingly more expensive. **The costs of many of the remaining opportunities are higher and in some cases more technically difficult.**

Local supplies and imported water complement, not compete.

Local projects should complement the State Water Project, Colorado River and the LA Aqueduct, not be presented as a substitute for it. **Nothing in this proposal demonstrates that California can maintain the benefits of imported water**—including water supply reliability, flood management, renewable energy production, recreation, and economic stability—**by relying primarily on a portfolio of aspirational projects, optimistic assumptions, and largely untested claims about future water supply production.**