



Media Release

State Water Board Approves Mercury Control Strategy for Fish in Sacramento and San Joaquin River Basins

For Immediate Release

June 21, 2011

Contacts: Ken Landau

(916) 464-3291

George Kostyrko

(916) 341-7365

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) today approved a strategy designed to ultimately reduce the amount of mercury and methylmercury impacting fish inhabiting the Sacramento and San Joaquin river basins.

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Valley Water Board) adopted a basin plan amendment in April 2010 that set maximum levels of mercury allowable in fish that individuals may catch and consume, and established a plan for how mercury levels will be reduced in the two major river basins that make up part of the Delta waterways. The State Water Board action allows the Central Valley Water Board to move forward with this strategy.

“State Water Board adoption of our collaborative, regional effort to effectively reduce both the levels and sources of mercury contamination is greatly appreciated,” Central Valley Water Board Executive Officer Pamela Creedon said following the State Water Board action. “The Delta waterways are an abundant resource for our region, and attract thousands of recreational visitors annually. Left unaddressed, inorganic and naturally occurring mercury in the waterways pose significant risks to both humans and wildlife who consume Delta fish.”

The State Water Board’s resolution clarifies that commercial and sport fishing are a beneficial use and should be protected in both the Delta and the Yolo Bypass. The resolution establishes specific levels of mercury and methylmercury in fish for both commercial and sport fishing in the Delta region, to begin reducing mercury exposure to humans consuming fish, and fish-eating wildlife.

In addition, the State Water Board resolution allows for the proposed Delta Mercury Control Program to begin a two-stage process that identifies sources of mercury and methylmercury and allows a collaborative approach between state, federal and regional agencies and the environmental community to reduce the sources of mercury that pose a risk for humans and wildlife.

For more information on this resolution and effort, please visit the following internet location at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_info/agendas/2011/jun/062111_5.pdf



The State Water Board's action sets the stage for final approval of the plan by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the State Office of Administrative Law.

Background:

The Delta is on the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired Water Bodies in part, because of elevated levels of mercury in fish. In this case, the beneficial uses of the Delta for fishing, and fish consumption by humans and wildlife are impaired by the presence of various forms of mercury. This Clean Water Act section requires the State to set Total Maximum Daily Levels for compounds like mercury, and to establish a plan to lower fish mercury levels in the Delta so that the beneficial use of fishing and wildlife can be ensured for generations.