

Delta Bills Likely to Face Broad Opposition

The “Delta package” of legislation is becoming more and more controversial while lawmakers and stakeholders prepare for the airing of the bills. **Five introduced bills** will be heard at the state Capitol by a select group of lawmakers amid growing concerns, raised by nearly all interests who have a stake in the Delta’s transformation – including environmental and business groups – about how the measures appear to do too little to improve the region’s environmental health or improve its capabilities for water conveyance and storage.

The legislative proposals seek to write into law new protections, and accompanying governance, for the estuary created by the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers – best known as the Delta. The imperative for action is created by the dual risks to both the region’s fragile ecosystem and the state’s drinking water brought on by decades of neglect. A single seismic event, for example, could cause a collapse of natural and man-made protections against intruding sea water which threatens Delta animal and plant species as well as the purity of water used in the Central Valley and further downstate for both agricultural irrigation and human consumption.

But, groups like CBIA are concerned that the bills, while containing much about establishing multiple layers of new government and how certain areas of the region will be fenced off from anything other than environmental protection activities, do little to establish the systems and direction that will be needed if the Delta is to be used to increase water reliability. At the same time, several environmental groups have registered concerns that the bill package lacks the commitment of funding to accomplish the ecosystem-protection objectives that they say are essential for the Delta’s recovery. While legislative leaders have said they want the package approved by mid-September, doing so is unlikely with mounting opposition and so little time left.

