May 26, 2011

Dr. Gerald Meral                      Ms. Karla Nemeth
Deputy Secretary                     BDCP Coordinator
California Natural Resources Agency   California Natural Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street                    1416 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814                 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: BDCP Working Committees

Dear Dr. Meral and Ms. Nemeth:

On behalf of California’s salmon fisheries we wish to thank Secretary Laird and the two of you for your invitation to our State’s salmon fishery to participate in the development of a Bay-Delta Conservation Plan. Our goal is the same as yours, that the Plan comply with both the U.S. and California Endangered Species Acts as well as the recently enacted California law calling for the co-equal goal of restoring the Bay-Delta Estuary and its natural resources, including salmon, and development of a reliable water system for Californians who traditionally have depended on the Delta and its watershed as a source for water.

As you know, fishing interests were effectively “locked-out” of any meaningful participation in the development of the BDCP in the last administration. We welcome now the Brown Administration’s decision to make development of the BDCP inclusive -- opening participation to, among others, fishing and Delta counties’ representation, two of the major stakeholders -- in an open, transparent and science-based process.

We have reviewed the suggested Working Committees for the renewed development of the BDCP and are extremely concerned that none encompass the requirements for the protection and recovery of salmon resources. Not only is the Bay-Delta ecosystem, extending from the Sierra to the Gulf of the Farallones, the single most important estuary on the West Coast of both Americas, but it is also the migratory route for the second largest salmon runs in the lower 48 – four runs of chinook salmon emanating from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and their tributaries, along with Central Valley steelhead. This fishery is so important that it deserves and must have a working group dedicated to the protection, recovery and doubling (as required pursuant to both state and federal statute) of these magnificent fish whose economic importance is felt far beyond the rivers and estuary to the coast, including that of Oregon.
Although some of the working groups, we imagine, would touch on elements of salmon protection and recovery, none would provide the type of comprehensive approach necessary for ESA compliance. Nor, do we believe, would the sum of the effort of the current working groups, achieve the type of comprehensive and effective approach required by State and Federal law for development of, respectively, an acceptable NCCP or HCP. That is why a stand-alone salmon working group is essential.

We understand that approval for working groups may depend on water contractors who will be footing some of the bill. However, we would emphasize to them that absent a salmon working group, with knowledgeable salmon stakeholder participation, it will be difficult to develop a BDCP that, in fact, protects and recovers listed-salmon populations (as well as comply with State and Federal doubling requirements). The BDCP must encompass more than “window dressing habitat projects,” paid for by the public intended to facilitate construction of a major new freshwater diversion project. It is important for the water contractors paying for portions of the BDCP, therefore, that the issues of salmon protection and recovery be effectively and comprehensively addressed, which calls for the establishment of a salmon working group.

To facilitate the establishment of a salmon working group, a number of the signatories below, are willing to participate, pursuant to your invitation for working group membership. Further, the Golden Gate Salmon Association has successfully raised funds necessary to support one individual who will be able to dedicate all of their time to this working group and BDCP development. The fishing groups are willing to carry their weight in the development of the BDCP.

We would appreciate your earliest response to this letter. The signatories here and the Golden Gate Salmon Association would like to submit names to you by your Friday deadline or as soon as the salmon working group is established. And, again, thank you for your kind invitation to participate; we most assuredly will.

Sincerely,

Dick Pool           Victor Gonella       Zeke Grader        Roger Thomas     Darrell Ticehurst
Water4Fish    GGSA       PCFFA  GGFA          Coastside Fishing Club

cc. Senator Fran Pavley – Chair, Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee
Assemblyman Wesley Chesbro – Chair, Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture
Assemblyman Jared Huffman – Chair Assembly Water Parks and Wildlife Committee
Secretary John Laird – California Secretary of Natural Resources.
Dr. Don McIsaac – Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council