

# CENTRAL VALLEY FLOOD MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROGRAM

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Technical Memorandum

## **CVFPP Phase 1 – External Communication and Engagement Assessment – Executive Summary**

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# Executive Summary

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) is committed to continuous improvement of all aspects of communication and engagement for the Central Valley Flood Management Planning Program (CVFMP) and the resulting Central Valley Flood Protection Plan (CVFPP). As part of planning for future phases of work, the CVFPP team of contracted neutral mediator-facilitators has conducted an assessment of the current CVFPP communication and engagement process. Assessment goals were to summarize efforts to date, evaluate outcomes, extract key lessons learned and provide recommendations for use in designing future public engagement. A key part of the assessment process involved gathering stakeholder views through meeting discussions, interviews and surveys. Stakeholders offered constructive suggestions for improvement as well as highlighting areas for concern that could potentially affect future project success. CVFPP leadership is using this feedback in its design of future project phases.

## Overview and Background

The purpose of the CVFMP is to develop a sustainable, integrated flood management plan for areas protected by facilities of the State-Federal flood protection system in the Central Valley (Valley). Through the CVFPP, DWR seeks to create a broadly agreed to, long-term vision for improving flood management in the Central Valley. DWR believes a well-executed communication and engagement process is essential to project success.

DWR began communication and engagement efforts almost immediately after it was advised of its responsibilities for preparing the CVFPP by meeting with critical interested stakeholders and partners, both in and outside of government, to learn more about their desires for communication and engagement. More than 100 stakeholders were consulted in early 2009 to provide input.

Based on this and other feedback, DWR in June 2009 published a CVFPP Communication and Engagement Framework, which mapped out a systematic and collaborative planning process offering many options and venues for the public to participate. The first participation opportunity took place in spring 2009 when DWR held five Regional Forums in various parts of the CVFPP study area to introduce the project. Starting in August 2009, DWR convened a series of Regional Conditions Work Groups and Topic Work Groups, involving 192 individual stakeholders. Representatives of local governments, flood agencies, landowners,

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environmental organizations and other interested parties applied or were invited to participate in these work groups.

DWR also gave periodic briefings about the CVFPP and public engagement to Boards of Supervisors, City Councils, interest groups, Tribes and tribal organizations. Presentations were designed to ensure elected officials, interest groups and tribal organizations were aware of the CVFPP and its implications for their communities. A briefing was also conducted for interested legislative staff.

As the first phase of work was concluding, DWR requested that a Phase 1, mid-process assessment be conducted to:

- Summarize the communication and engagement effort
- Evaluate outcomes
- Extract key lessons learned
- Provide recommendations for use in designing future engagement

### Assessment Methodology

Conducted by neutral mediator-facilitators from Kearns & West and the Center for Collaborative Policy, California State University Sacramento, the assessment primarily evaluates the Regional Conditions Work Group (RCWG) and Topic Work Group (TWG) efforts. The bulk of stakeholder views were gathered from December 2009 through March 2010 in structured meeting discussions, interviews, and surveys. Original Assessment questions focused on the provision of meaningful opportunities to collaboratively develop plan content; representation of regional views and interests; process design; facilitation; recording of discussions; access to needed information; lessons learned; and suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the work groups. Of the 192 work group members, 18 participated in the online survey, 24 completed in-depth interviews, and nearly all (approximately 90) RCWG members participated in discussing the topic during a work group meeting. In the few cases where appointed work group members never attended a meeting, facilitators followed-up with them to learn whether they had concerns.

Additional information was generated during Regional Work Group Meeting #8 and post Phase I meetings with various stakeholders. This information, including additional participation is contained in the Assessment Addendum.

## Results

Respondents offered constructive suggestions for moving forward into future phases of work, as well as highlighting areas of concern that could potentially affect future project success. Most respondents provided many favorable comments on DWR's efforts to-date, although a handful expressed significant concern and suggested changing the approach to meetings and the process as a whole. The assessment does include a cautionary tale: most stakeholders reserved judgment about DWR's commitment to the process until they could see the Regional Conditions Summary Report and had been briefed on the next phase of work. Comments and suggestions emphasized by work group participants follow.

Suggestions for future project phases included:

- DWR must ensure there is a clear explanation of why participant-generated information is important and how it is to be used -- this is critical to keeping people involved. They suggested that DWR leadership begin by demonstrating directly the relevance of stakeholder and partner participation and the value of continued engagement, particularly since members volunteered their time.
- DWR will need to be mindful that transparency will become even more important during the next phase of work, when multiple, competing options generated by stakeholders will have to be weighed and the process becomes more contentious. Members expressed concern that Phase I work group efforts on goals and objectives might not be incorporated into future work products.
- At the start of Phase II, a clear process for working together and completing the plan must be laid out. It was suggested that this include practical items like the schedule, work objectives, expected products and their use, and expected level of effort. DWR should provide greater detail on major steps, work product integration, and what will occur after management actions are identified.

### Comments on Phase 1

- **Representation, Participation, and Roles** – While complimentary of DWR's commitment to engagement and efforts to be inclusive, a variety of group members highlighted that some interests or technical perspectives are currently missing from their work group and made suggestions for filling those gaps. Several respondents were concerned that major State and federal agencies were missing from discussions or missed multiple meetings. Several noted that an environmental

perspective was sometimes missing. Many RCWG members felt that participation dwindled over time due to what they believed were concerns about the lack of incorporation of feedback, and the number of meetings. Scattered concerns were raised that some comments were largely ignored, not seriously addressed, or misrepresented. These participants sought clarification on how comments on draft documents are processed

- **Pacing and Work Volume** – Many participants commented that Phase I pacing and volume of work were not sustainable. They felt the accelerated timeframe did not allow for sustained participation or enable the refinement needed to produce high-quality, balanced deliverables. All respondents recognized the constraints driven by external deadlines and several suggested that deadlines be revisited. Most stakeholders offered constructive suggestions for reducing meeting length, including pre-working some materials for group review, instead of the group attempting to create information in the meeting. Several suggested distributing documents further in advance and extending comment periods to enable members to review and thoughtfully comment on the large amount of material.
- **Meeting Support and Process Design** – Aside from pacing and work volume, most respondents gave meeting support and the general process design positive marks.
- **Work Product Integration** – The majority of RCWG and TWG members were unaware of, or confused by efforts to integrate input from various work groups in the Regional Conditions Report, and integrate the CVFPP development process with parallel policy efforts. Most noted they were frequently unclear about whether or how work group product integration was taking place. Because stakeholders have not yet seen final work products, it was difficult for them to assess the degree that information generated across all work groups had been integrated. The original work group process design included the use of a Valleywide forum to share this type of information, but the forum has been postponed. Most stakeholders felt integration was an important issue that should be addressed, as clear integration of their input would demonstrate that their work had value.
- **Key Challenges** – Participants identified challenges for future CVFPP development, particularly in the development of management actions. Most stakeholder recommendations were tactical, specific, and related to process design.

- **Key Messages and Suggested Strategies** – While work group members were aware of outreach to elected officials, key opinion leaders and others, they suggested that more outreach, more often, would be needed. They affirmed the importance of early and routine local government engagement for building advocacy, overcoming resistance to change, and ensuring successful implementation. They also highlighted the need for broader communications to the general public on flood issues. In addition, they emphasized that key messages must directly address sensitive local concerns, including fears that the State is passing liability onto local government, that government will take land, or that local concerns will be unaddressed or misrepresented by the CVFPP.

## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Results provided by stakeholders, while largely positive, included some significant reservations that must be addressed in future phases of work. Additionally, perspectives gathered during the assessment process, while sometimes hard hitting, offered a number of well considered recommendations.

Based on stakeholder input and additional input provided by staff and project contractors, this assessment offers findings and recommendations that identify current effective efforts that warrant continuation, and target areas for improvement.

The following summarizes key issues to be considered in future project phases.

- **Transparency** – For project success, DWR must continue to be transparent in all aspects of project management. This includes better articulating and defining roles and responsibilities, as well as disclosing data development approaches, planning assumptions and decision-making processes. DWR should appropriately establish what decision areas will remain with the agency and announce and discuss this in advance of any decisions.
- **Time and Resources** – Stakeholders expressed the need to operate from realistic timeframes and deadlines. Resources to support plan development and stakeholder engagement must continue to be consistent, and scopes of work should be reflective of resource realities. The Phase 1 pace and volume of work was considered not sustainable and needs to be re-scoped. Numerous recommendations are offered to address this concern and improve meeting and process efficiencies.

Ideas include reducing the length of Work Group meetings and better utilizing meeting time by focusing on critical deliverables. Other suggestions include creating more sub-committees, pre-working and presenting select draft concepts for group discussion, better using web based tools, and better utilizing personnel assigned to support the stakeholder functions. These recommendations should be incorporated into future project design. Further, time is a critical risk factor for communications. Failure to communicate in a timely way and provide fresh material for review can lead stakeholders to believe DWR is not committed to transparency, resulting in a loss of goodwill developed to date.

- **Clearly Defined Executive Sponsorship and Decision Authority** – Clear policy direction, agency support and decision authority is essential to CVFPP. Numerous issues and recommendations for improvement are offered. Clear decision authority is essential to producing timely communication.
- **Clear Project Plans and Approaches** – Stakeholders emphasized the importance of a clear, publicized project plan, and specifically discussed actions needed to support the development of management actions. Future communication and engagement should be tightly aligned with producing plan deliverables. Communications goals, objectives and assumptions should be transparent and understood by all participants.
- **Broader Stakeholder Outreach** – Stakeholders appreciated efforts to date and expressed a need for an even more expansive outreach to build CVFPP support. In addition to sharing the broader FloodSAFE message with the general public, special attention must be made to engage local opinion leaders. Early and regular communications will ensure that local decision makers are not surprised by plan direction, allow project concerns to surface early so they can be addressed, and make certain that stakeholders impacted by the CVFPP understand the consequences of not moving forward with system improvements.
- **Best Practices** – Communication and engagement and project management practices are well known and should be intentionally incorporated in future phases of work. A method for monitoring and reporting performance metrics should be instituted.

## Assessment Addendum

Additional content was added to the assessment based on a series of meetings that happened subsequent to the document's original draft. Interviews and comments from stakeholders captured during Meeting 8 of the Regional Conditions Workgroup, the Agricultural Subcommittee, feedback given from Environmental Interest groups and the results of two additional stakeholder meetings with the project team have been added.

Overall, work groups in Meeting 8 felt strongly that there was not enough representation by the Army Corps of Engineers. They also felt the work pace was too rigorous.

Participants of the Agricultural (Ag) Subcommittee thought that DWR did a good job of engaging appropriate stakeholders but were sometimes critical of the tone of the meetings with some expressing skepticism about the process' neutrality.

Following release of the CVFPP Interim Progress Summary (IPS) No. 1, the CVFPP project team was contacted by several stakeholder participants with concerns regarding the nature and findings of the IPS No. 1. While the IPS No. 1, due to its interim nature, will not be revised all agreed stakeholder comments were highly important in progressing towards meaningful stakeholder participation and progressive Project/Plan development. It was also noted that the CVFPP Phase 1 Project Assessment was specifically designed to document the perspectives of stakeholders regarding work to date and creates a reference point for future project phases.

In general, these stakeholders were dissatisfied with the lack of inclusion of some of the important issues raised during the Phase 1 meetings, the discussion process, and the characterization of the "Level of Agreement" Section of the IPS. They provided comments and suggestions for places throughout the document that they felt did not acknowledge their perspective and/or understated their concerns. This information, along with other information gathered in this Phase 1 Assessment will be considered in future phases of project/plan development.

## **Conclusions**

The communication and engagement function is critical to overall project success. This assessment has validated the importance of DWR's effort to work with stakeholders to achieve good CVFPP outcomes. CVFPP project leadership is utilizing feedback gathered by this assessment to enhance its design of future phases of work.

