South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project

January 23, 2006

TO: National Science Panel

FROM: Executive Leadership Group

Thank you for the most recent report summarizing the National Science Panel's recommendations regarding long-term restoration planning for the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. Since its inception, the NSP has provided important feedback regarding the role that science is playing in the long-term planning process in the SBSP. The value that the Executive Leadership Group places on the NSP's recommendations is underscored by the fact that it has accepted and implemented the vast majority of those recommendations, as documented in the report provided to the NSP by the Project Management Team and Science Team at its last meeting.

In addition to the NSP, teams of other scientists are also playing a significant role in developing the SBSP long-term restoration alternatives. The Consultant Team, which is preparing the analyses of the long-term planning alternatives and their potential effects, is working with the Project Management Team on an almost daily basis to ensure proper integration of the best available scientific knowledge into the environmental impact statement and report. Advising the Consultant Team and the Project Management Team is the Science Team, which is collecting and synthesizing scientific knowledge relevant to the SBSP. The Lead Scientist also participates actively in Project Management Team meetings, where her input is integral to Project Management Team decision-making.

The SBSP's commitment to science is reflected in the project budget, which has devoted substantial financial support to integrating applied science into the project planning process. Approximately 24% of the SBSP project budget is being spent on acquiring, synthesizing, and analyzing scientific data, with another 9% going to funding NSP and Science Team activities. This is significantly greater than the 10 to 15% percent of total project costs that the NSP suggests in its report would be a sufficient funding allocation. The NSP has recommended that another $1 million be allocated for more adaptive management studies during planning, but this is not possible as the budget for the planning effort did not include such additional major research activity.

For the long-term, the ELG agrees with the NSP that it is important to plan ahead so that science can continue to play a key role in the SBSP once the planning process is complete. The agencies are beginning to seek funding for the implementation of the restoration plan as a whole, including funding for science and adaptive management in particular. Funding for implementation is likely to be from a mix of sources: Federal (WRDA), State (bond measures), local (parcel tax or similar vehicle), and private

(donations, grants, and mitigations). The ELG and Project Management Team will be working hard to make sure that each of these sources is cultivated in a way to provide a distinct portion for science. However, a steady funding stream which is essential for funding science and adaptive management has not yet been identified. The most prominent example of such a successful mechanism is the Glen Canyon Dam project where science and adaptive management are funded by the ongoing generation of hydroelectric power. There is not yet a similar, obvious opportunity for the South Bay Salt Ponds.

The NSP has suggested that a new Lead Scientist should be brought on board to help with fundraising, engaging the academic community, and generating interest in the SBSP more generally. The ELG agrees with the NSP that this will be a difficult role to fill, as the NSP is calling for someone who is at least as much a development director as a scientist, and this may best be a separate position from the Lead Scientist. Moreover, the NSP itself acknowledges that the current Lead Scientist and the Science Team are making valuable contributions to the planning process.

Nevertheless, the ELG agrees that the tasks the NSP has identified will promote the long-term future of science in the SBSP. For example, greater engagement of the academic community in the project would be beneficial, not least because it potentially offers a much broader base of support for long-term, project-related science than simply relying on government funding. To generate this interest and engagement particularly among local academic institutions, the ELG concurs with the SBSP's recommendation to organize a "South Bay Symposium" and is planning to do so later this year. More details regarding the symposium will be distributed to you for your information in the near future. The Project will also seek to fund more science outreach focused on connecting the Project with the academic community.

The ELG would also like to draw on the extensive experience of the NSP's members, who were chosen because of their high-level involvement in restoration projects across the United States, to further the integration of science into the SBSP restoration. In particular, the ELG requests that the NSP devote a portion of its next meeting to a roundtable discussion of what, in its members' own experience, has proved to be successful in terms of increasing academic engagement, funding for science, and general interest in restoration projects. It would also welcome insights on avenues that proved to be less successful in leading towards achieving those ends. Such a discussion falls well within the role that the NSP identified for itself in its first report in July 2003, when it stated that "[m]embers of the NSP agreed that the most appropriate role for this group would be an advisory role at a strategic level, not in conducting detailed review of documents."

The NSP has also made a variety of recommendations regarding the Initial Stewardship Plan. Some of these have been quite helpful, such as its comments on making the most use of the funds allocated for Island Pond scientific research. However, unlike the long-term planning process, the ISP is not the focus of the NSP's work in connection with the SBSP. The ISP was an interim plan to deal with an immediate

problem, namely that the water in the ponds would continue to evaporate until they effectively became salt flats. The State of California had experienced this phenomenon with previous salt ponds that they had acquired from Cargill in the North Bay, and found that it significantly complicated long-term restoration of those ponds, as well as leaving some of the pond areas nearly worthless as habitat in the meanwhile. To avoid this problem, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game had to move relatively quickly to allow the flow of Bay water into and out of the ponds. After completion of an Environmental Impact Statement and Report in March of 2004, they began implementing the ISP. Implementation is now nearly complete and has been largely successful, giving the agencies breathing room to develop restoration alternatives accompanied by a well-thought out adaptive management program.

Given these facts, the ELG thanks the NSP for its input on the ISP, but cannot accept all of its suggestions. For example, it does not make sense to now recommend implementing adaptive management "at the beginning of the ISP process" (Recommendations p. 4.). Nor, given the need to move forward on completion of the ISP, is it appropriate to re-start the proposal process for the Island Ponds. Still, many opportunities exist for learning and incorporating scientific knowledge to assist in ISP management. Accordingly, the SBSP is integrating data collection and analysis under the ISP to improve interim management and to learn what we can to assist in long-term restoration management.

Looking ahead to 2006, the ELG would like the NSP to provide help and advice through the activities noted below:

April – Institutional Retreat: include one or more NSP members, by invitation, to participate in the Institutional Retreat, which will develop recommendations for short and long-term institutional mechanisms for Project decision-making.

May – South Bay Symposium: provide advice in the next two months to help develop the Symposium

June – NSP meeting: provide recommendations on the science and adaptive management components of a proposed institutional structure resulting from the earlier Institutional Retreat

June – NSP meeting: move forward with the meeting structure proposed in the last NSP report, but focus on one of these topics for detailed discussion and recommendations:

- productivity in South Bay and how pond restoration may affect productivity
- landscape changes in South Bay due to further urbanization and global climate change that will affect the Project
- how to develop an ecosystem model for the South Bay and beyond

June – NSP meeting (or separate): organize a meeting with key researchers and academic leaders from Stanford, U.C. Berkeley, U.C. Santa Cruz, San Jose State University, U.C.

Davis, and California State University East Bay to develop a plan for academic involvement of local institutions.

In organizing the next NSP meeting, the ELG would like to utilize the Center for Collaborative Policy staff working with the NSP Chair and the Executive Project Manager and Lead Scientist. We believe that Center's support can help maximize the productivity of the next meeting.

As the agencies, the scientific community, and the public move forward in planning the long-term restoration of the salt ponds, the NSP's role of providing high-level strategic advice on science in the SBSP will continue to be crucial. The ELG thanks the NSP for its work to date and looks forward to an ongoing dialogue that will inform and improve the implementation and outcome of the project.

cc: Project Management Team