

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Budget Change Proposal - Cover Sheet
 DF-46 (REV 07/23)

Fiscal Year 2026-2027	Business Unit Number 3885	Department Delta Stewardship Council
Hyperion Budget Request Name 3885-003-BCP-2026-GB		Relevant Program or Subprogram 3370 – Delta Stewardship Council

Budget Request Title
 Independent Peer Review for Science and Monitoring

Budget Request Summary

The Delta Stewardship Council requests \$539,000 General Fund ongoing and 3.0 permanent positions to support the Council's Delta Science Program and the Delta Independent Science Board (Delta ISB) in performing independent scientific review, advice, and monitoring for the implementation of the State Water Resources Control Board's Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan. The Council also requests \$139,000 General Fund ongoing and the inclusion of annual budget bill language to cover statutorily required rate increases for the members of the Delta ISB.

Requires Legislation (submit required legislation with the BCP) <input type="checkbox"/> Trailer Bill Language <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Budget Bill Language <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Code Section(s) to be Added/Amended/Repealed	
Does this BCP contain information technology (IT) components? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <i>If yes, departmental Chief Information Officer must sign.</i>	Department CIO	Date

For IT requests, specify the project number, the most recent project approval document (FSR, SPR, S1BA, S2AA, S3SD, S4PRA), the approval date, and the total project cost.

Project No. Project Approval Document:

Approval Date: Total Project Cost:

If proposal affects another department, does other department concur with proposal? Yes No

Attach comments of affected department, signed and dated by the department director or designee.

Prepared By Henry Debey	Date 1/9/2026	Reviewed By Ryan Stanbra	Date 1/9/2026
Department Director Jessica Pearson	Date 1/9/2026	Agency Secretary N/A	Date

Department of Finance Use Only

Additional Review: Capital Outlay ITCU FSCU OSAE Dept. of Technology

Principal Program Budget Analyst Andrew Hull	Date submitted to the Legislature 1/9/2026
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A. Problem Statement

The Delta is one of the most complex and climate-vulnerable estuaries in the U.S. It provides drinking water to more than 27 million Californians, fuels a thriving agricultural economy, is home to California's first National Heritage Area, and serves as essential habitat for many threatened and endangered species.

Chapter 5, Statutes of 2009, Seventh Extraordinary Session (SBX7-1)—known as the Delta Reform Act (DRA)—established the Delta Stewardship Council and tasked the Council with developing a long-term management plan for the Delta (the Delta Plan) and advancing the state's coequal goals for the Delta. To achieve these goals, the DRA codified the importance of independently reviewed science in the Bay-Delta by establishing the Delta Science Program (DSP), tasked with "funding research, synthesizing and communicating scientific information to policy-makers and decision-makers, promoting independent scientific peer review, and coordinating with Delta agencies to promote science-based adaptive management" to fulfill its mission of "providing the best possible unbiased scientific information to inform water and environmental decision making in the Delta" (Wat. Code, § 85280, subd. (b), paragraph 4.). On average, state and federal agencies request that the DSP facilitate independent peer review three times per year and enter into three-to-five-year reimbursable agreements for those services.

Promoting peer review is one of the DSP's key statutory obligations and is a cornerstone for developing best available science. Peer review ensures scientific objectivity and validity, enhances credibility, reduces conflict, builds trust in science, and limits litigation. The DSP has a proven track record in providing reviews with integrity, transparency, and efficiency, and has become a trusted leader for promoting and conducting independent reviews of science to inform decision-making in the Delta. Since 2010, the DSP has coordinated 36 independent science reviews and advisory panels, including science pertinent to the management and permitting of the State Water Project (e.g., Incidental Take Permit), Central Valley Project (e.g., Biological Opinions), California WaterFix Aquatic Science, and many other state and federal priorities.

The DRA also established the Delta Independent Science Board (Delta ISB), which is composed of ten internationally prominent scientists from across the country and supported by DSP staff. The Delta ISB was created to further fulfill the mission of the DRA by providing independent scientific review and oversight in the Delta. Since 2013, the Delta ISB has produced over 100 influential reports and products on a wide range of topics from water quality to levee hazards to restoration. There is a need, now more than ever, for peer review facilitated by the Council's DSP and independent scientific oversight led by the Delta ISB to provide transparent and robust processes that build trust in government science and decision-making.

To note, both the DSP and the Delta ISB provide review services, but they serve different, equally important purposes. DSP technical peer reviews are narrow and specific and ensure scientific quality at the project or product level. Delta ISB reviews are big-picture, often span multiple programs, and provide strategic oversight and system-wide evaluations of science.

This BCP seeks to address three urgent problems:

Problem #1: Insufficient DSP capacity to respond to new interagency peer reviews

Current capacity in the DSP to conduct peer review at the Council is 0.75 positions (Table 1A and 1B), spread across 3.0 Environmental and Senior Environmental Scientist positions who also support other DSP functions, beyond peer review. This capacity has been exceeded in recent fiscal years (fiscal year 2023-24 to 2024-2025), at the expense of other statutory functions including funding scientific research, synthesizing and communicating scientific information, and facilitating adaptive management (Wat. Code, § 85280.). Ongoing redirection of staff resources to address DSP needs is unsustainable.

Most recently, in the draft Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Watershed (Bay-Delta Plan), the State Water Resources Control Board has requested three peer reviews, annually, from the DSP, over the course of the next eight years, focused on reviewing the Delta's scientific monitoring system, including gaps and needs. The reviews requested by the Board would differ from typical reviews provided by the DSP in that more data analysis and synthesis would be done internally, in addition to the standard administrative duties associated with facilitating reviews (contracting, coordinating peer review teams, and managing expert deliverables). As such, these reviews are anticipated to be much more time- and resource-intensive and require specialized scientific monitoring expertise. Each of these annual reviews is anticipated to require 0.5 positions (while a standard review requires 0.25 positions). With three reviews requested per year, this results in workload for 1.5 positions.

Table 1A: Workload History Delta Science Program

Workload Measure	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Number of Peer Reviews	1	1	3	4	3	3
Senior Environmental Scientist available for Peer Reviews (positions)	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75
Senior Environmental Scientist working on Peer Reviews (positions)	0.25	0.25	0.75	1.00	0.75	0.75
Number of contracts required (avg 5/review)	5	5	15	20	15	15

Table 1B: Projected Outcomes Delta Science Program

Workload Measure	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
Number of Peer Reviews	6	6	6	6	6
Senior Environmental Scientist available for Peer Reviews (positions excluding BCP)	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75
Senior Environmental Scientist working on Peer Reviews (positions)	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25
Number of contracts required (avg 5/review)	30	30	30	30	30

Problem #2: Delta ISB member rate increases

In 2021, Chapter 650, Statutes of 2021 (SB 821), established the Delta ISB hourly rate of \$150 per hour and required that Delta ISB member hourly rates increase annually to account for inflation. For reference, Delta ISB members work on average 400 hours per year.

Since 2021, the Council has redirected funding, supplanting critical resources for other DSP statutory functions (including funding research, synthesizing and communicating science, and facilitating adaptive management) to account for these increases. By 2026-27, the Council will need to redirect an additional \$139,000 for Delta ISB rate increases, and this will grow to \$204,000 annually by 2030-31. To cover annual inflation increases for Delta ISB members without further impacting DSP statutory functions the Council requests \$139,000 ongoing from the General Fund and the inclusion of annual budget bill language authorizing the Department of Finance to augment the Council's budget by the amounts necessary to cover the cost of statutorily required rate increases in future years.

Problem #3: Increased demand for Delta ISB services

DSP staff dedicated to supporting the Delta ISB has grown significantly in recent years. This trend stems from three factors:

- a) Administrative and contractual challenges associated with Chapter 296, Statutes of 2019 (AB 5), that disrupted the Delta ISB's work in 2020 and 2021 and required the Delta ISB to rely on additional staff support (both permanent and contracted support) to carry out its work.
- b) The assessment of the impact and value of the Delta ISB, which recommended that the Delta ISB do more outreach and communication of their products (briefings, workshops, and public comment periods), thereby requiring more DSP staff support.
- c) Most recently, a request from the State Water Resources Control Board for the Delta ISB to provide ongoing scientific advice as it pertains to the implementation of the Bay-Delta Plan and review of the scientific rationale of the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes Program.

Currently, permanent staff capacity to support the Delta ISB at the Council is 1.65 positions (Table 2), shared by 2.0 Senior Environmental Scientist positions and 2.0 program manager positions, who support the Delta ISB's highly technical and public-facing activities as a Bagley-Keene body. Further, the Delta ISB is also supported by 2.0 contractors (a California Sea Grant postdoctoral scholar and a state policy fellow) amounting to 1.7 positions (1.0 position for the postdoctoral scholar and 0.7 positions for the state policy fellow).

The current staffing approach that relies on existing DSP staff support is unsustainable.

Table 2: Delta ISB Workload History

Workload Measure	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Number of Products Completed	8	2	7	6	8	TBD
Number of State employees supporting Delta ISB (positions)	1.25	1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65	1.65
Number of Contractors supporting Delta ISB (positions)	0.5	0.7	2.7	2.7	0.7	1.7

B. Justification

The justification for this BCP is organized according to the three problem statements described above.

Insufficient DSP capacity to respond to requested peer reviews

The Council needs additional capacity to respond to the State Water Resources Control Board's request to provide three peer reviews of monitoring surveys per year to inform the implementation and adaptive management of the Bay-Delta Plan.

Currently, the DSP has staff capacity (0.75 positions) that can perform roughly three reviews per year. Peer review services are technical and laborious, involving communication between requesting agencies and independent scientific experts, scheduling meetings, scoping reviews, coordinating with the Delta Lead Scientist, developing and managing reimbursable agreements, contracting with independent scientific experts, carrying out editorial reviews, hosting public meetings and other opportunities for public engagement, generating communication materials, and more. Furthermore, these tasks must be done in a dynamic regulatory environment prone to delays, contentious debate, and urgent review requests (e.g., exceeding a threshold in a permit).

Since 2016, the DSP has tracked hours needed to support peer review services. A typical review requires 400 hours from the staff lead environmental scientist or senior environmental scientist, depending on the complexity of the review. These hours include the support provided by fellows and other temporary staff assisting with peer reviews or hours spent developing reimbursable agreements (i.e., DSP time is only reimbursed once agreements are in place).

Furthermore, the reviews requested by the Board in the draft Bay-Delta Plan go beyond the typical peer review services provided by the DSP. These reviews will require specialized knowledge and skills on monitoring in the Delta, monitoring design, endangered species biology, and water operations, the ability to coordinate technical workshops, develop work plans for Board review, analyze data, generate written summaries, prepare meeting minutes and reports, and providing expert opinion and testimony at public workshops or Board meetings. Each of these annual reviews is anticipated to require 0.75 positions. With three reviews per year expected, this results in a resource gap (current resources vs need) of 1.5 positions. While the DSP has some expertise in these areas, the DSP does not have the necessary capacity to support these Bay-Delta Plan reviews.

If DSP were to take on the Board's requested reviews, its current peer review workload, over the next eight years, would be as follows (see Table 1A and 1B, and Figure 1):

1) State Water Board's Bay-Delta Plan;

- 2026-2029: 3 monitoring reviews per year
- 2029-2034: 3 monitoring reviews per year

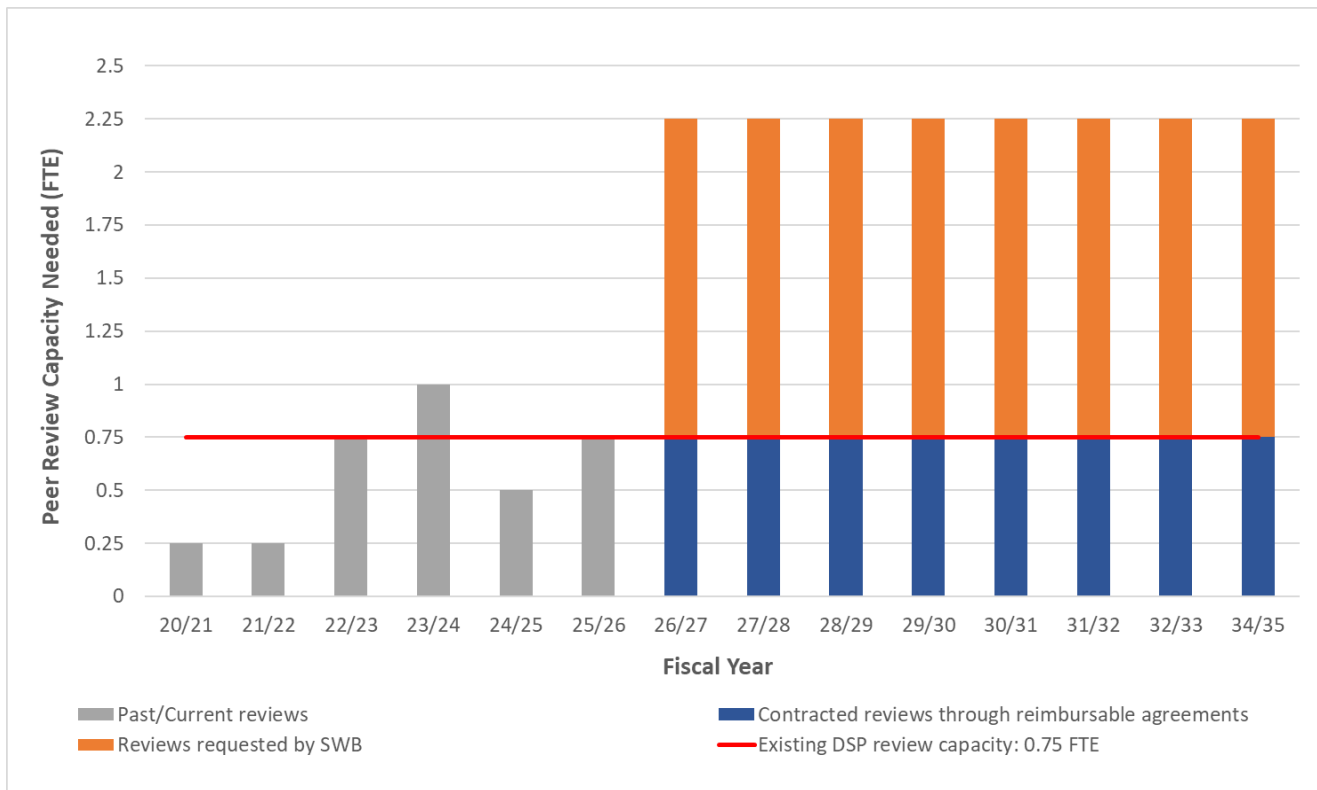
2) California Department of Water Resources' (DWR) Incidental Take Permit Reviews (supported by a reimbursable agreement)

- Through 2026: 1-2 reviews per year
- 2026-2029: 1-2 reviews per year

3) U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's (USBR) Long-term Operations for the Central Valley Project and State Water Project (supported by a reimbursable agreement)

- Through 2029: 1-2 reviews per year

Figure 1: Past, existing, contracted and requested peer reviews, by fiscal year



Fulfilling existing commitments for peer reviews (from DWR and USBR) and taking on two additional monitoring reviews annually over the next eight years requires a total of 2.25 positions (0.75 positions supported by reimbursable agreements with the DWR and USBR, and 1.5 positions for the Board's reviews), resulting in a shortfall of 1.5 positions. Therefore, the Council is requesting 2.0 Senior Environmental Scientist positions to support critical reviews of the monitoring surveys stipulated in the draft Bay-Delta Plan (December 2025 Bay-Delta Plan, Appendix A, Table A-2).

Without the requested positions, the Council wouldn't be able to fulfill the Board's request, thereby threatening the quality, transparency, and integrity of a foundational state water planning document.

Delta ISB member rate increases:

The required increase in Delta ISB member rates cannot be accommodated without further compromising other DSP core functions. The ten-member Delta ISB, with experts from various disciplines (fish biologists, geologists, economists, etc.), has provided valuable input on critical science documents to inform decision-making, such as the scientific basis for the Delta Plan, Delta conveyance, and the Bay-Delta Plan.

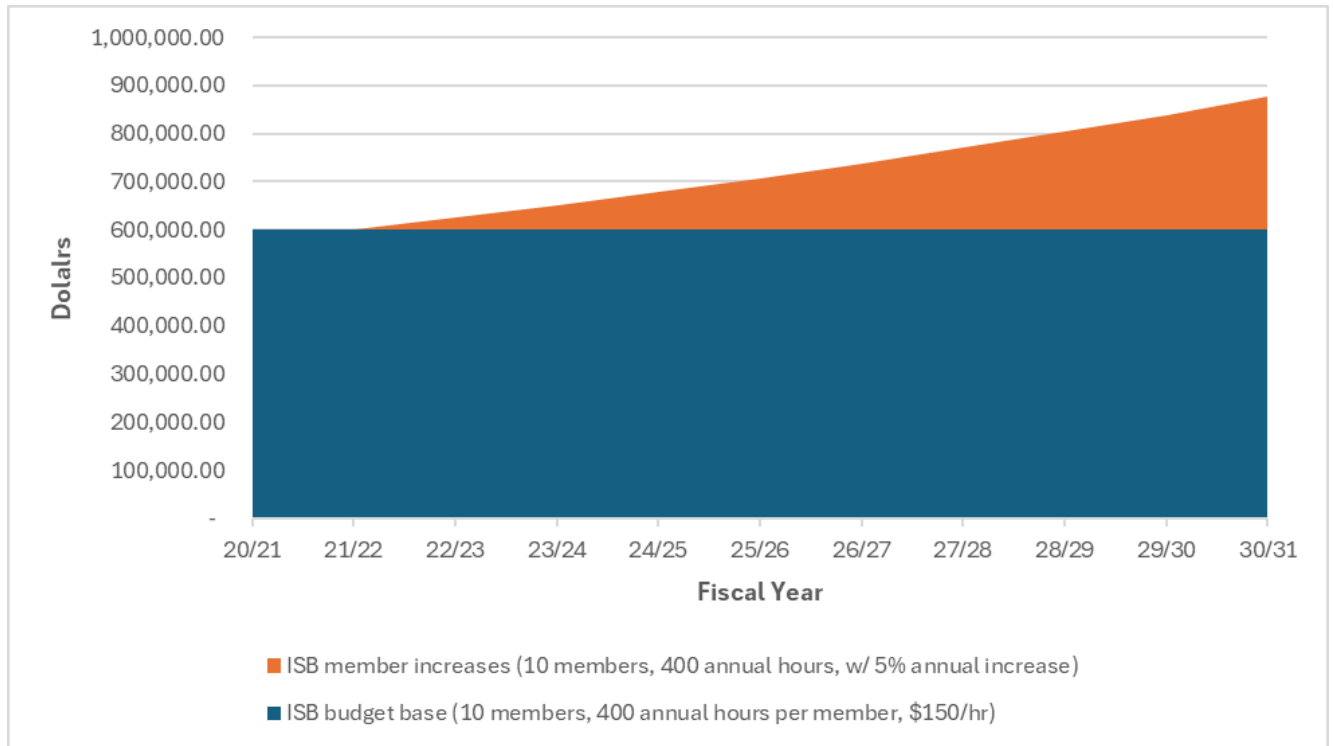
SB 821 established the hourly rate of Delta ISB members at \$150 and mandated increases annually to account for inflation (Figure 2). In 2025-26, the hourly rate has risen to \$182 per hour. Since 2021, the Council has covered these mandated increases—\$108,000 per year currently—but without dedicated resources these continued increases jeopardize other DSP statutory functions. By 2030-31, the estimated increase in Delta ISB member rates will grow to \$276,000 annually, assuming annual 5% increases.

These sustained increases threaten other DSP statutory functions, outlined in the Delta Reform Act, including funding research, synthesizing and communicating science, facilitating independent peer review of government science, and facilitating adaptive management. Specific examples of impacts range from reduced funding for the Delta's only free and open access journal (the San Francisco Estuary and Watershed Science Journal), the Bay Delta

Science Conference (a major regional science conference with over 1,000 participants), Maven's Notebook (a key water news aggregator with thousands of subscribers), and more.

The requested annual budget bill language authorizes the Finance to augment the Council's budget by the amounts necessary to cover rate increases for the members of the Delta ISB associated with inflation and cost of living adjustments. This will allow the Council to cover the mandated increases on an ongoing basis in an administratively efficient manner.

Figure 2: Delta ISB budget, by fiscal year, including base hourly wage and mandated increases



Increased demand for Delta ISB services:

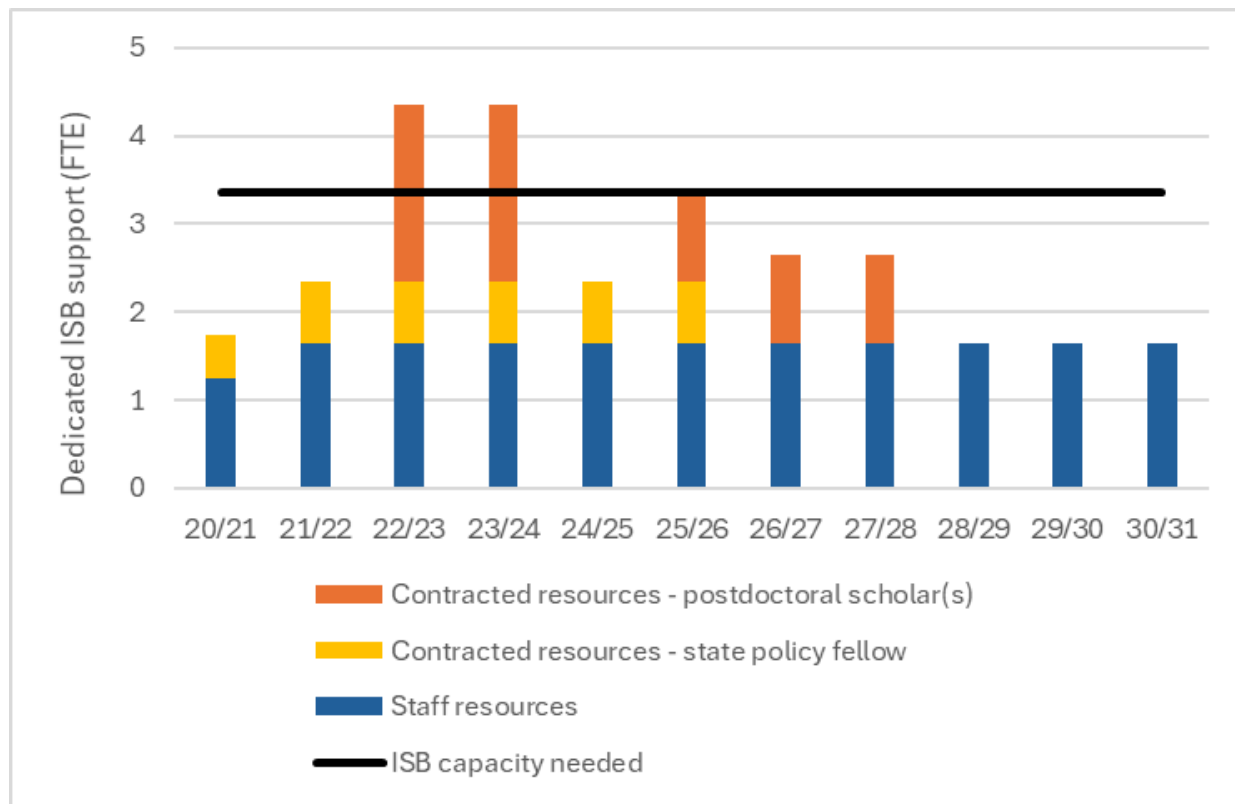
The Delta ISB is currently supported by 1.65 positions and 2.0 contractors. The number of DSP support staff and contractors dedicated to the Delta ISB has grown in recent years (Figure 3). This is the result of:

1. A greater reliance on staff support from the Delta ISB due to administrative and contractual challenges associated with AB 5 that disrupted the Delta ISB's work in 2020 and 2021.
2. Explicit requests from the Delta science community for increased outreach and communication of the Delta ISB's work, requiring significantly more staff support.
3. Increased demand for Delta ISB services—most recently the State Water Board requested that the Delta ISB provide critical scientific advice toward their implementation of the Bay-Delta Plan (December 2025 Draft Bay-Delta Plan, Section 4.4.9.10, and Appendix A, Section A.2.1)—requiring significant additional administrative and technical support (e.g., coordinating between boards, managing product workflows, scheduling meetings, conducting data analyses, editing reviews, and more).

Despite the growing demand and need for Delta ISB member services, the Council will not be able to continue to contract out support past 2027-28 due to funding limitations and competing funding needs. Therefore, the addition of 1.0 Senior Environmental Scientist is essential for maintaining technical staff support for the Delta ISB. The addition of 1.0 permanent staff member to provide technical support for the Delta ISB would reduce contracting burdens and preserve institutional knowledge. This additional position would

ensure that the Delta ISB can continue to advance its critical work and meet the increased demands for its services.

Figure 3: Delta ISB administrative and technical support resources (available and needed), by Fiscal Year



Exhausted efforts to redirect staff and funds for Delta ISB and peer review support:

To date, the DSP has addressed the capacity constraints described above—related to carrying out DSP peer reviews and providing Delta ISB staff support—by both redirecting DSP staff from other DSP core functions (e.g., facilitating adaptive management, a statutory core function), contracting for Delta ISB staff support, and denying additional peer review requests (e.g., State Water Board and the National Marine Fisheries Service).

DSP staff advance several other core statutory functions that cannot be diverted to additional reviews or the Delta ISB. These include:

1. Funding research in the Delta to inform water and environmental decision-making, including biennial research awards, research fellows, and directed actions (e.g., wildfire impacts on the Delta).
2. Synthesizing and communicating scientific information to policymakers and decisionmakers, including producing the flagship State of Bay-Delta Science, funding Maven's Notebook, and facilitating synthesis working groups in collaboration with the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis.
3. Coordinating with Delta agencies to promote science-based adaptive management through the Interagency Adaptive Management Integration Team (IAMIT) and Suisun Adaptive Management Advisory Team (required in the Suisun Marsh Plan), and biennial Adaptive Management Forums.
4. Promoting collaborative science and science planning through the Delta Science Plan, Science Action Agenda, and the social science community of practice.

C. Departmentwide and Statewide Considerations

The DSP's facilitation of independent scientific peer review and staff support of the Delta ISB advances several statutory requirements and policy priorities for the Council, Governor Gavin Newsom's Administration, and other state and federal agencies, including:

- DSP and Delta ISB technical review support outlined in the draft Bay-Delta (the DSP is referenced supporting the Board's decision-making eight times throughout the document, on pages 43, 106, 110, 112, A-2 and A25; the Delta ISB is referenced seven times on pages 88, 89, 90, 83, 110, A-2 and A-23).
- Promoting science-based management, a cornerstone of Governor Newsom's Water Resilience Portfolio and Water Supply Strategy, which specifically calls for the implementation of the Delta ISB recommendations to improve Delta monitoring (not fully implemented due to limitations in Delta ISB staff support).
- Ensuring that State Water Project operations and management are informed by the best available science through the reviews of science underpinning key permits (e.g., the Incidental Take Permit for the State Water Project) and regulations (e.g., reviews of monitoring surveys to adaptively manage the Bay-Delta Plan).
- Fulfilling the DSP's statutory role of promoting independent scientific peer review and supporting the Delta ISB as stipulated in current law.

D. Outcomes and Accountability

The 2.0 additional positions for the DSP would accommodate the increased demand for peer review services from the DSP (see Table 1A and 1B, and Figure 1). With an expected increase of up to seven peer reviews per year, the additional DSP staff capacity would ensure that issues underlying water project operations and their governing regulations are informed by the best possible science. As an example, the significant increase in contracts required for additional reviews (more than three times) would be addressed with the requested positions, and the Council will be able to quickly contract with subject matter experts in response to urgent and high-profile peer reviews.

The requested one-time funding and annual budget bill language will efficiently provide the Council with the financial resources needed to sustainably compensate Delta ISB members in accordance with current law, without having to further redirect other DSP statutory functions. It will also help ensure the compensation remains competitive, so the Council can recruit internationally- or nationally renowned scientists to provide scientific oversight of programs that support adaptive management, as required by California Water Code section 85280, subdivision (a), paragraph (3).

The 1.0 additional position for the Delta ISB will ensure adequate technical support for the Delta ISB, whose scope of work has significantly expanded since 2021 due to increased awareness of and demand for its services as well as increasingly complex challenges in the Delta. Without an additional position, the Delta ISB cannot continue to meet its current obligations as required by the DRA and take on new responsibilities proposed by the State Water Board's Bay-Delta Plan.

E. Implementation Plan

As soon as additional resources are approved, additional staff will be hired, estimated July 2026. These staff will be trained up and immediately begin work to support peer reviews and the Delta ISB, in turn supporting essential implementation of the Bay-Delta Plan. Likewise, if implemented, increases to Delta ISB member rates could immediately take effect and no longer supplant other core functions of the Delta Science Program.

F. Supplemental Information (If Applicable)

N/A

BCP Fiscal Detail Sheet

(Dollars in Thousands)

BCP Title: Independent Peer Review for Science and Monitoring

BR Name: 3885-003-BCP-2026-GB

Budget Request Summary

Personal Services

Personal Services	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Positions - Permanent	0.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Total Positions	0.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Salaries and Wages	0	320	320	320	320	320
Earnings - Permanent						
Total Salaries and Wages	\$0	\$320	\$320	\$320	\$320	\$320
Total Staff Benefits	0	161	161	161	161	161
Total Personal Services	\$0	\$481	\$481	\$481	\$481	\$481

Operating Expenses and Equipment

Operating Expenses and Equipment	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
5301 - General Expense	0	58	58	58	58	58
5340 - Consulting and Professional Services - External	0	139	139	139	139	139
Total Operating Expenses and Equipment	\$0	\$197	\$197	\$197	\$197	\$197

Total Budget Request

Total Budget Request	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Total Budget Request	\$0	\$678	\$678	\$678	\$678	\$678

Fund Summary

Fund Source

Fund Source	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
State Operations - 0001 - General Fund	0	678	678	678	678	678
Total State Operations Expenditures	\$0	\$678	\$678	\$678	\$678	\$678
Total All Funds	\$0	\$678	\$678	\$678	\$678	\$678

Program Summary

Program Funding

Program Funding	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
3370 - Delta Stewardship Council	0	678	678	678	678	678
Total All Programs	\$0	\$678	\$678	\$678	\$678	\$678

Personal Services Details

Positions

Positions	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
0765 - Sr Envirnal Scientist (Spec)	0.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Total Positions	0.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0

Salaries and Wages

Salaries and Wages	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
0765 - Sr Environmental Scientist (Spec)	0	320	320	320	320	320
Total Salaries and Wages	\$0	\$320	\$320	\$320	\$320	\$320

Staff Benefits

Staff Benefits	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
5150900 - Staff Benefits - Other	0	161	161	161	161	161
Total Staff Benefits	\$0	\$161	\$161	\$161	\$161	\$161

Total Personal Services

Total Personal Services	FY26 Current Year	FY26 Budget Year	FY26 BY+1	FY26 BY+2	FY26 BY+3	FY26 BY+4
Total Personal Services	\$0	\$481	\$481	\$481	\$481	\$481