



## ***Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program Final Update Staff Report***

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This agenda item provides a final update for the Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program, a six-year effort that will end in June 2020.

### **DESCRIPTION**

The Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program (Delta MERP) is a collaborative effort of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, the California Department of Public Health, and the Department of Water Resources. Delta MERP's primary goal is to protect public health by reducing the risk of exposure to methylmercury (mercury) from eating fish from the Delta. This has primarily been accomplished through coordinating with underserved communities to increase their awareness through Delta fish consumption advisories and other educational materials.

Some fish caught in the Delta and other water bodies in the state contain elevated levels of mercury. While fish is a highly-nutritious food, it is important to limit or avoid the types of fish that are high in mercury because mercury consumption has adverse health effects especially in vulnerable populations such as babies, children, and women of gestational age. Many families, often those in underserved communities, depend upon fishing to support their food needs; this population is at-risk of high mercury exposure. Delta MERP addresses the risk of exposure to mercury with all vulnerable populations through collaborative efforts with community-based organizations, tribes, state agencies, counties, and cities.

The Conservancy entered into two interagency agreements (IAA) with the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board): the first extending from June 2014-June 2017 and the second from December 2017-June 2020. As provided under the IAAs, the Conservancy worked together with the Water Board to implement a suite of actions intended to educate communities about ways to reduce mercury exposure. Together with the Water Board, the Conservancy designed, evaluated, and produced multi-lingual educational materials based on advisories developed by the Department of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment; developed and implemented training and other exposure-reduction activities; identified and engaged community leaders and community-based organizations in the dissemination of Delta MERP messaging; formed a stakeholder advisory group to solicit feedback on Delta MERP materials; and posted 147 mercury consumption advisory signs at 99 fishing access points. Delta MERP has been a successful collaborative, unfortunately Water Board funding for the program has been discontinued and the program will end at the completion of the current contract in June of this year; the Conservancy provided the Water Board with a final report describing all program activities.

**BACKGROUND**

The Delta Mercury Exposure Reduction Program (Delta MERP) began in 2013 and the Conservancy joined the effort in 2014. It was initiated by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board to address concerns about high levels of methylmercury in fish tissue found in Delta waterways that are commonly consumed by the public. Three fish consumption advisories, guidelines that recommend how often you can safely eat fish caught from water bodies, were created by the Office of Health Hazard Assessment for the Delta. Delta MERP has made these advisories central to increasing public awareness of safe fish consumption.

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