EDITORIAL *On California's water system*

Plan for delta full of holes

After four years and $150 million, California has a Bay Delta Conservation Plan that makes major scientific omissions and probably won't conserve any water.

What went wrong?

The core failure of the plan is that it has no clear strategy. That's what the National Research Council concluded this week in an 81-page report that blasted the plan for incoherence and ineffectiveness.

The council, which is the research arm of the National Academy of Sciences, sent 12 accomplished scientists and engineers to weigh in on California's plans for the delta. Basically, they concluded that California's state and local water agencies don't pay attention to science and can't figure out a plan that will balance competing interests in a sensible and sustainable way.

It's embarrassing but not surprising. For decades, water policy in California has been dictated by politics instead of science. That's not likely to change, even with the release of the council's report.

Most people still expect that the delta plan, incomplete as it is, will trundle on. But at the very least, the council's withering criticism must force California's water agencies — and Gov. Jerry Brown — to fix some of these incredible omissions and mistakes.

The first error that needs to be fixed is the idea that a "conveyance" around the delta is a given fact rather than a controversial option. The voters said no to a peripheral canal back in 1982, but agricultural interests remain obsessed with one.

The authors of the delta plan bowed to their influence and wrote the plan as if there were no other option. This explains why there's a lack of scientific information on water flows, habitat and environmental concerns — a conveyance isn't likely to be good for any of these things.

California water agencies need to stop wasting the public's time and offer real solutions. This delta plan isn't one. Go back to the drawing board.