



Niland Chamber of Commerce
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March 10, 2015

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov

Subject: Comment Letter: Salton Sea

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

On behalf of the Niland Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to express our support for the Imperial Irrigation District's petition regarding restoration of the Salton Sea. As the Board recognized in its Notice of Public Workshop, this issue is an urgent one of statewide importance. It is also a particularly important issue for the residents, businesses, and local government of the Imperial and Coachella valleys, which will bear the most direct and substantial costs of the failure by the State of California to restore the Salton Sea.

The Niland Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit organization and is unlike a typical chamber of commerce. It is a bit of a misnomer. Where a typical chamber is made up of business owners that advocate on behalf of the business community, the Niland chamber has evolved over the years and is essentially made up of non-business members for the purpose of promoting the well being of all individuals. Niland is known for its annual Tomato & Sportsmans Festival, which is the longest running festival in Imperial County. Many visitors come to the area in winter to enjoy hunting and outdoor activities. The townsite of Niland is designated as a colonia. Niland is a socially and economically disadvantaged community and has a high incidence of substance abuse, school drop outs, unemployment and crime. With Niland being an unincorporated community, it is the Chamber of Commerce that is the advocate for Niland's residents. Niland is located about five miles east of the Salton Sea.

Cities and local governments in the Salton Sea region have a responsibility to protect the health and welfare of our residents. When our local economy struggles, or when public-health and environmental problems arise, our budgets are strained and our ability to provide basic services is impaired. That is why we are concerned about the State's failure to restore the Sea.

Without restoration, declining water levels and increasing salinity at the Sea will have many serious consequences for communities like ours. The decline of water levels resulting from water transfers under the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) will expose thousands of acres of lakebed to the air. Emissions from this exposed playa will significantly worsen our region's already-poor air quality and cause many residents of the Imperial and Coachella valleys to suffer from heart disease, asthma, lung cancer, and other health problems. Increasing salinity levels, which will accelerate sharply once the interim mitigation measures ordered by the Board end in 2017, threaten to destroy the Salton Sea ecosystem. And the economic impact of a dying Sea will be a major burden on businesses, schools, public services, and the overall quality of life for residents in the Imperial and Coachella valleys, and specifically within the Niland area. That is the harsh reality facing our region.

The QSA was supposed to prevent this from happening. As IID explained in its petition, it has long been recognized that water transfers out of the Imperial Valley would be a major threat to the Salton Sea and the Imperial and Coachella valleys. These concerns almost derailed the entire QSA, but the agreements were signed after the State of California promised to restore the Sea. This promise was a matter of basic fairness and the QSA would not have been signed without it. The water transfers benefit the entire State, so the Legislature agreed that the entire State would bear the cost of addressing the effects of the transfers on the Salton Sea. It is fundamentally wrong for the residents of the Imperial and Coachella valleys—areas which already suffer some of the State's highest unemployment rates—to be forced to bear the consequences of California's effort to reduce its usage of Colorado River water.

Now, more than a decade later, almost no progress has been made on restoration of the Salton Sea. It is time for action. Several studies in recent years have confirmed that restoration is both feasible and necessary to protect the health and well-being of residents and communities around the Sea. The Board should use its power to bring all necessary parties together to design, implement, and fund a restoration plan that will create a smaller, sustainable Sea and preserve a bright future for the Imperial and Coachella valleys.

On behalf of our community, residents, and businesses, we call upon the Board to approve IID's petition. The Board, the State, IID, and all other interested parties should cooperate to ensure that the Sea is restored before it is too late. We ask the Board to convene a collaborative process among these parties that will identify a specific restoration plan that can be implemented and funded in time to avert the looming crisis threatening our region and the entire State.

Sincerely,

Marta Mata

Marta Mata, President

cc: Stephen W. Benson, Board President, Imperial Irrigation District
Ryan E. Kelley, Chairman of the Board, County of Imperial