



Neighborhood House of Calexico

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March 9, 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 Neighborhood House of Calexico, I am writing to express our support for the Imperial Irrigation District's petition regarding restoration of the Salton Sea. It is notable that the Board recognized in its Notice of Public Workshop that this issue is an urgent one of statewide importance. It is also a particularly significant issue for the students, families, and schools of the Imperial and Coachella valleys, which will bear the some of the most direct and long lasting costs of a failure to restore the Salton Sea.

Calexico Neighborhood House is a 501(c) 3, private nonprofit agency, located at 506 E. Fourth Street in Calexico, California. Since 1938, Calexico Neighborhood House has continuously operated as a community center and social services agency. It was established as a settlement house to assist and work with residents of the border community.

Related to the United Methodist Women-Women's Division, Calexico Neighborhood House provides a comprehensive array of direct services to low-income families in the areas of case management, preschool services, early literacy, shelter for homeless women and children, transitional housing, emergency assistance, micro-business support, thrift store, volunteer services, and meals for children.

Throughout the years we have seen the effect of our on-going effect of air pollution on our children. We have seen our families have to deal with the local struggling economy. 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 and our children in the Imperial County. The declining

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 Valley 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 long lasting burden placed on our residents, and most of all our children, in the Imperial County. That is the harsh reality facing our region.

As IID explained in its petition, the QSA was supposed to prevent this from happening. 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 that already face significant challenges—to be forced to bear the consequences of California's effort to reduce its usage of Colorado River water.

To date, more than a decade later, almost no progress has been made on restoration. 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 the Salton Sea region. 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 families, our children- 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,



Ricardo Ortega
Executive Director

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