

Afshan N. Baig, M.D., Commission Chair
Blanca Acosta, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

Imperial County Local Health Authority

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 Imperial County Health Authority Commission, I am writing to express our support for the Imperial Irrigation District's petition regarding restoration of the Salton Sea. Thank you for recognizing that the impact of the transfer of water from Imperial County is an issue of statewide importance. The Commission believes that the impact of the transfer of water is a health issue of vital importance to the people of Imperial County, especially the children in our communities.

The Imperial County Health Authority was created by the Imperial County Board of Supervisors, in accordance with California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 14087.38, to meet the needs and challenges of publicly assisted healthcare delivery. The healthcare system in Imperial County is both fragile and unique, serving a disproportionate number of low income residents and families with a shortage of both primary and specialty care physicians in a geographic region where healthcare needs to be coordinated across international, state, and multiple county borders. As the Commission, we are vested with the responsibility to improve both the health of our community and the health of our healthcare system.

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. The detrimental effects of a damaged environment will worsen the health of Imperial County residents already struggling with disproportionate rates of respiratory illness and a strained healthcare system. Asthma is a respiratory illness that is of particular concern. Imperial County children have the highest rate of emergency department visits and hospital admissions due to asthma in California. Children under five years of age are most severely affected. Despite local efforts to improve asthma rates in the County, asthma and other respiratory diseases continue to be a significant health threat for our community.

Exacerbating an already significant health issue threatens to overwhelm the ability of our limited resources where 55,000 county residents currently depend on Medi-Cal for health services.

Almost no progress has been made on restoration in more than a decade. 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 Salton 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Afshan N. Baig, M.D." The signature is written in a cursive style.

Afshan N. Baig, M.D, Commission Chair
Imperial County Local Health Authority

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