

Horacio A. Rodiles, M.D., Inc.
1358 Appaloosa Road
El Centro, CA 92243



March 8, 2015

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk of the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Comment Letter: Salton Sea

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

As a Commissioner on the United States-Mexico Border Health Commission, I am writing to express my 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 health of those people in and around the Imperial and Coachella valleys. It is the people in and near the Salton Sea who will bear the burden and experience the most direct health costs of a failure to restore the Salton Sea.

I have been working as a Nephrologist in the Imperial County since 1976 and for the last two years on the Bi-National Health Commission. We have identified air quality in our county and Mexicali, which shares the same valley as Imperial and Coachella, as hazardous to the health of the entire population. Asthma and respiratory disease in children and adults is much higher here than norms in other areas. Also acute and chronic diseases have a much higher incidence that add to the morbidity and mortality of our population, as well as adding to the cost of healthcare that continues to escalate to unsustainable levels. Restoration of the Salton Sea will contribute to alleviate the ill effects of pollution in our population, and help reduce healthcare costs.

The public health of the people in the Imperial and Coachella valleys will be critically affected from the State's failure to restore the Salton Sea. 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 regions 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, as I stated above. Both the direct financial costs (in the form of direct healthcare expenses and indirect costs associated with health care) and human costs (in terms of increased mortality, lost productivity, and so forth) will be substantial, and will be a major burden on the families, communities, businesses and local government in the Imperial and Coachella valleys. 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 face significant public health challenges, to be forced to bear the consequences of California's effort to reduce its usage of Colorado River water.

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

For the sake of public health in the Salton Sea Region, 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,



Horacio A. Rodiles, M.D., F.A.C.P.
Commissioner
United States-Mexico Border Health Commission
Medical Director
FMC Dialysis Center, Calexico

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