

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 the National Latina Business Women Assoc. Inland Empire (NLBWA-IE), 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 hard-working residents and business community of the Imperial and Coachella valleys, who will bear the most direct and substantial costs of a failure to restore the Salton Sea.

The NLBWA-IE works with and supports Small Businesses in the Inland Empire as well as the communities and families. Businesses in the Imperial and Coachella valleys are closely tied to the overall health and well-being of their communities. When the broader community prospers, so does the local economy; when it suffers, so do local businesses. That is why we are so 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 the residents and businesses in the Imperial and Coachella valleys. 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 the region's already-poor air quality and cause many residents to suffer from heart disease, asthma, lung cancer, and other health problems. These air quality and health problems will directly harm the employees and owners of businesses in the Imperial and Coachella valleys, as well as their families. 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 drag on productivity and a major burden on businesses, schools, public services, and the overall quality of life for residents in the Imperial and Coachella valleys. That is the harsh reality facing the 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 that 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. 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 businesses in 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 the business community in California and in the Imperial and Coachella valleys, 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 the Salton Sea region and the entire State.

Sincerely,

CBolbolian

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