



Heber Public Utility District

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(3/18/15) Public Workshop
Salton Sea
Deadline: 3/11/15 by 12:00 noon



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 Heber Public Utility District Board of Directors 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.

Heber is an unincorporated community within Imperial County and partially serviced by the County of Imperial and other public agencies including the Heber Public Utility District. The Heber Public Utility District was formed in 1931 under the Public Utility Act of 1921 for the specific purpose of providing wastewater and water services to the Heber community. The Townsite of Heber is a small community of about 7,000 people uniquely located between the two most populated cities within Imperial County, El Centro and Calexico.

Local governments, and Special Districts, in the Salton Sea region have a responsibility to protect the health and welfare of its residents. 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 Heber Public Utility District Service area. That is the harsh reality facing our region.

Heber Public Utility District is an equal opportunity provider and employer

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 and poverty 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 Heber Public Utility District, its 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,



Eduardo Valdez-Belmonte,
President of the Board
Heber Public Utility District

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