

March 11, 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 Ms. Townsend,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Imperial Irrigation District's (IID) petition regarding the promised restoration of the Salton Sea by the State Water Resources Control Board. As stated in the workshop notice, "IID has brought an issue of statewide importance to the Board's attention". This issue affects the health, safety, and quality of life for every resident of Imperial County, as well as the residents all over California and all over the United States that rely on the businesses and industries based in Imperial Valley.

I am a PhD Candidate in Environmental Anthropology with the University of California, Irvine. For the past six months, I have conducted field-based research in rural desert communities in Southern California, including the region around the Salton Sea. My research investigates how these small communities manage their limited water resources, and the impact of water insecurity on their social, political, and material infrastructures. I have listened in community meetings and public workshops; conducted interviews with residents, visitors, and public officials from many walks of life; and consulted fellow research scientists who study the past, present, and possible future of the Salton Sea. This letter is written based on my own firsthand experience gathering and aggregating this data.

The Salton Sea is not simply one body of water; it is a necessary component of a water-based, coupled natural and human system. When the Sea is not healthy, the entire system is not healthy. The current condition of the Salton Sea and the accelerated decline expected post-2017 will have severe consequences, both expected and as yet unknown. Imperial Valley residents envision a future where the Salton Sea is not permitted to decline after the water transfer, but rather is restored to promote resident health, increase property values, attract renewable energy businesses that will create stable local jobs, and protect the agricultural jobs that have served as the lifeblood of these communities for one hundred years. Completing the proposed water transfer without committing to restoring the Salton Sea is effectively telling the families, community leaders, educators, farmers, business owners, public lands employees, seasonal residents, and scientists who rely on the Sea that they do not matter as stakeholders in California's future.

Specifically, I request that your Board continue to work with IID and a diverse, truly representative cross-section of stakeholders in the Imperial Valley to achieve the goal of a long-term, feasible, enforceable, and fully funded restoration plan for the Sea. Formally linking the restoration of the Salton Sea to the IID water transfer is fundamentally an environmental justice issue: without restoration of the Sea, the already disadvantaged residents of Imperial County (the poorest County in California) are asked to bear the vast majority of the negative impacts of the water transfer, while the vast majority of positive benefits accrue to some of California's most affluent residents in the coastal cities. Currently, Imperial Valley residents do not feel they have an equal voice or equal representation in this process at the state level. They need a "seat at the table" for the development, implementation, and enforcement of a restoration plan; they need assurances that their values and recommendations will be taken under serious consideration by both the County and the State; and they need options for recourse if the promises made to them are not upheld. Given that residents' concerns speak directly to the Board's Mission Statement of preserving, enhancing, and restoring "the quality of California's water resources...for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial use, and to ensure proper water resource allocation and efficient use, for the benefit of present and future generations," I believe there is a necessary and appropriate role for the State Water Resources Control Board in helping to meet these needs. I am hopeful that the Board's involvement in this critical matter will encourage participation and commitment from *all* stakeholders involved, while developing a vision and producing a path forward that everyone can support.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Emily Brooks
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