



LATE COMMENT

March 11, 2015



Ms. Jeanine Townsend
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RE: 3/17-18/2015 BOARD MEETING – BOARD WORKSHOP

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

On behalf of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), I am writing to encourage action by the State Water Resource Control Board to facilitate a dialogue among state agencies and interested stakeholders to bring resolution to the looming health and environmental crisis of a dying 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 within the SCAG region, which covers the two most impacted counties (Imperial and Riverside) as well as communities that rely on the water supply benefits of the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA).

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The SCAG region encompasses six counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura) and 191 cities in an area covering more than 38,000 square miles. The agency develops the long-range regional transportation plan including the sustainable communities strategy and growth forecast components, regional transportation improvement program, regional housing needs allocation and a portion of the South Coast Air Quality management plan. The agency's Regional Council also serves as a forum for convening leaders and promoting dialogue on issues that contribute to the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the region. The Regional Council has received regular updates on the Salton Sea and in May 2014, SCAG's full governing body, the General Assembly, adopted a resolution supporting the Salton Sea Restoration & Renewable Energy Initiative.

Local governments within 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.

The Regional Council consists of 86 elected officials representing 191 cities, six counties, six County Transportation Commissions, one representative from the Transportation Corridor Agencies, one Tribal Government representative and one representative for the Air Districts within Southern California.

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With 2017 quickly approaching and interim mitigation measures ending, now is the time for action. Several studies in recent years have confirmed that restoration is both feasible and necessary to protect the health and wellbeing 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.

The Board, the State, 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Hasan Ikhata". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Hasan Ikhata
Executive Director