

Southwest High School



March 8, 2015

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to 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:

The AP Government students from Southwest High School would like to address their concern over the progress of the Salton Sea restoration, or lack thereof. We may be seniors and some of us may be leaving for college soon, but many of us have family and younger siblings that will remain in the Valley and we are worried about their future health. As part of our summer assignment, us students were required to attend at least three of the different council meetings, including city council, IID, and the school district. One of the IID meetings the public was able to attend was the Clinton Health Matters Initiative regarding the concern over the Salton Sea restoration. This meeting covered what was planned for the restoration, how long it would take, information regarding the current state of the sea, and the current health issues that would occur if the restoration did not take place. The Imperial Valley community has a high rate of children and adults with asthma or allergies, and without the restoration it could cause those numbers to rise. It does not help that the assistance from medical experts is not readily available or supplied here in the Valley.

We are 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 significant issue for us, as students and young residents of the Imperial Valley who will be living with the consequences of a failure to restore the Sea for decades to come.

We are concerned about the serious environmental, health, and economic effects that students and residents of the Imperial and Coachella valleys will suffer if restoration of the Sea does not occur. 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 our region's already-poor air quality and cause many residents of the Imperial and Coachella valleys, including students and their families, 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 long-lasting burden placed on our residents, and on young people in particular, in the Imperial and Coachella valleys. That is the harsh reality facing our region.

As IID explained in its petition, the QSA was supposed to prevent this from happening. 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 and young people of the Imperial and Coachella valleys—who already face significant socioeconomic challenges—to be forced to bear the consequences of California’s effort to reduce its usage of Colorado River water.

To date, more than a decade after the QSA was signed, 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 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 our fellow students, parents, teachers, friends, and neighbors, 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,

Karissa Cruz, Allissa Drye, Kyle Deol, Andrew De La Torre, Stephan Leon, Ana Moreno, Chaeun Lee, Deyran Paredes, Oscar Alvarado, Nigel Rabbs, Erik Hunt, Alex Aguilar, Alyssa Vingochea, Albert Vargas, Shelbie Verbugh

6th Period AP Government at Southwest High School

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