



March 10, 2015

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board  
State Water Resources Control Board  
1001 I Street, 24<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
[commentletter@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:commentletter@waterboards.ca.gov)

**Subject: Comment Letter: Salton Sea**

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

On behalf of the City of Calipatria, I am writing to express our support for 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.

Incorporated in 1918, the City of Calipatria with a population of 7,705 is located in the northern portion of Imperial County, approximately 150 miles east of San Diego, 100 miles south of Palm Springs, 38 miles north of the United States-Mexico border and four miles from the southeast shoreline of the Salton Sea. Calipatria is a tightly knit community with deep agricultural roots. Agricultural and government-based jobs account for more than half of the total jobs in the city. The City relies both on a strong employee base, generated by the Calipatria State Prison, and on a secondary unreliable employment base tied to the agricultural industry. There is a consistent Geothermal Industry within the surrounding area of Calipatria and the Salton Sea, with the anticipation of several solar farms to be built within the next several years. The City of Calipatria is the nearest incorporated City to the Salton Sea, and has a significant environmental interest/concern of the outcomes of the declining shoreline of the Salton Sea.

Local governments 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 City of Calipatria area. That is the harsh reality facing our 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 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 the City of Calipatria, 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;



Maria Nava-Froelich, Mayor Pro-Tem

Cc:

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

frb:cjh