California State Water Resources Control Board

Testimony of Tom Raftican
President, United Anglers of Southern California

My name is Tom Raftican. I am the president of United Anglers of Southern California, a conservation organization representing more than 40,000 affiliated anglers from throughout California. Our association has been active in the release of white seabass, in kids conservation and fishing programs, in habitat enhancement programs, in access to fishing and in the pursuit of responsible fishery management. We and our consultants are actively involved in California state programs including the Nearshore Fishery Management Plan(FMP), the White Seabass FMP, the Marine Life Management Act Master Plan, the Ocean Resources and Hatchery Program and on the federal level with the Pacific Fisheries Management Council's Highly Migratory Species FMP. In addition to these duties, I have represented the recreational angling community in the Ocean Resources Enhancement and Hatchery Panel, the Marine Reserve Working Group for the Channel Islands, the State Lands Commission's Rigs to Reefs forum and on the Economics of Recreational Angling for the Senate and Assembly's Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

California can trace its sportfishing history back to the turn of the 20th century and we can pick up the history of angling at the Salton Sea sometime in the early 1950s. These Salton Sea fisheries consisted of mullet, Sargo, Croaker and Corvina. Tilapia arrived a little later, but may be the most abundant sportfish in the Sea.

For more than half a century recreational fishing has been a prime factor in attracting visitors to the Sea. Today, modern boats and equipment add to the fun finding the fish, and have the added advantage of being able to cover the vast expanses of the Sea in short time. Great fishing is still the key and the real enjoyment comes from participating in what many consider the best fishery in the Western United States. In particular Corvina are an excellent gamefish and they are readily sought. Fish in the ten to twenty pound range are plentiful, specimens from twenty to thirty pounds are taken regularly and trophy fish grow to thirty pounds and more. These aggressive predators can be fished with a wide variety of artificial "swimbaits" that have been designed specifically for enticing corvina. In addition to using specialty artificial lures, many are still taken on a variety of natural baits. Today's Corvina fishing at the Sea rivals the best fresh or salt water fishing anywhere and for any species. The amazing thing about this fishery is that one can reasonably expect to find this quality fishing on a regular basis. It's easy to get "hooked" on the Sea and many of our members are return visitors. I would like to emphasize this, that being able to catch fish this size and quality is not a common practice for anglers and once someone fishes the Sea, they are not likely to forget the quality fishing.

I would like to take a closer look at what the economics of fishing like that means to California and Imperial County. Under the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is required to analyze the economic impacts of management policies on fishing

participants and coastal communities. NMFS' most recent analysis is in a document entitled the Marine Angler Expenditures in the Pacific Coast Region, 2000. This NOAA document offers a cost analysis of saltwater sportfishing on the Southern California coast and deals with a type of fishing that is similar in some respects to what we do in the Salton Sea.

The study demonstrates that sportfishing has a very substantial economic impact in Southern California. From the study we find that in Southern California anglers spent 3,782,257 days in coastal fishing in the year 2000. (NOAA 2001, p. 7, Table 2.) The study also finds that these anglers spent a total of between $1,468,730,000 (low range) and $1,966,971,000 (high range). (NOAA 2001, Table 4.) Coastal resident shore anglers spend an average of $18.70 per day, non-coastal resident shore anglers $165.75; resident private or rental anglers spend an average of $37.16 daily, non-resident private/rental anglers spend $220.22; and resident party/charter anglers spend an average of $82.56, while non-resident party/charter anglers spend $494.71 per day. (NOAA 2001, Table 3.) Keep in mind these figures are for daily expenses only – such things as transportation, food, lodging, public transportation, fuel, fees, bait, and ice – they do not account for money spent on gear, licenses, boats, maintenance, etc. If annual expenditures on rods and reels, tackle, gear, boats and accessories, and other fishing-related goods are taken into account and expressed in terms of daily expenditures, the numbers are much higher. Resident shore anglers spend $105.67 daily, non-residents $214.41; resident private/rental anglers spend $158.19 per day, non-residents $305.09; and resident party/charter anglers spend $188.19 a day, non-residents $372.93. (*Id.*)

The study did not deal with how these numbers generated for coastal California would translate to the Salton Sea and Imperial and Coachella Counties, but these numbers are instructive nonetheless. In the first place, they illustrate the general point that sportfishing makes an extraordinary contribution to the economy of Southern California, measured in the billions of dollars. No resource as significant as the Salton Sea can be damaged or lost without having some effect on sportfishing expenditures. Secondly, the numbers illustrate a point that many often neglect when assessing the economic impact of sportfishing: much fishing-related spending occurs not on the day of the trip, but in the days, weeks, and months between and leading up to trips.

This second point is directly relevant to assessing the socioeconomic impacts the transfer will have in Imperial County and Southern California as a result of the impact on sportfishing. Under Impact S-5 in the section on socioeconomic impacts, the EIS/EIR notes that under the proposed project, all operational boat launching and mooring facilities would become non-operational in year 2007. (IID 2002, p. 3.14-24.) Also, the EIS/EIR notes that the salinity of the Sea would exceed the levels at which sargo, gulf croaker, and tilapia could successfully reproduce 1, 5, and 11 years earlier, respectively, as compared to conditions without the project. (*Id.*) The EIS/EIR then estimates that the present value of lost business output over this period as a result of lost recreational opportunities is about $790 million. (*Id.*) This is certainly a large number. However, this figures is derived from estimates published in a report to the Department of Fish and Game, which was based on a survey that took into account *only* daily expenditures, and

apparently took no account of impacts to spending on rods, reels, boats, and the like. (*Id.*) If these were accounted for, the lost business output as a result of reduced or eliminated sportfishing opportunities could be even higher.

By any accounting, loss of fishing opportunities as a result of the transfer will have a significant impact on the local economy, as the EIS/EIR recognizes. But even that figure does not capture the entire impact of the transfer on fishing at the Sea, or the value of fishing at the Sea. In the end, fishing is not about dollars and cents.

Possibly the most disconcerting fact about the potential loss of the fishery at the Salton Sea is the fact that there is really no comparable fishery anywhere. When we ask the question "If anglers can't come to the Sea, where will they go?" we find that there is no comparable fishery anywhere in the Southwest. There simply are no real fishing alternatives to the Sea. The Colorado River offers some fishing, but nowhere near the chance of catching such quality fish. Lake Powell in Nevada has access similar to the Sea's, but still does not offer the same type of quality fishing. The nearest opportunity to have the same chance at a quality gamefish would be hundreds of miles south in the Sea of Cortez fishing for Dorado on the East Cape of Baja. This is not a practical option for many Southern California residents, and it is not a practical option for fishing on a regular basis for anybody. Replacement fisheries don't exist locally. There are just no alternatives.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize the importance of the Salton Sea as a recreational opportunity that will be difficult if not impossible to replace. The real value of fishing lies not in a fish, but in the chance to catch a great fish. This state has long recognized the importance of our sport fisheries, to the extent the our our State Constitution, Article I, section 25, gives every citizen the right to fish in state waters. We request that you take action to ensure that the transfer goes forward in a way that is compatible with continuation of the Sea as a viable sport fishery.

References

IID 2002. Imperial Irrigation District, "Imperial Irrigation District Water Conservation and Transfer Program Draft EIR/EIS," State Clearinghouse Number 99091142, January 18, 2002.

U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, "Marine Angler Expenditures in the Pacific Coast Region, 2000," NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-49, October 2001.