

# IMPERIAL COUNTY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Planning / Building & Safety / Parks & Recreation



March 11, 2015

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board  
State Water Resources Control Board  
1001 I Street, 24<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov

**Subject: Comment Letter: Salton Sea**

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

The Imperial County Planning Commission expresses support for the Imperial Irrigation District's petition regarding restoration of the Salton Sea. This issue is a critical and urgent one of statewide importance, as the State Water Resource Control Board (State Board) recognized in its Notice of Public Workshop. It is also a particularly significant issue for the residents, businesses and farmers of Imperial Valley, who will bear the most direct impact to their land, businesses and livelihood as a result of the failure to restore the Salton Sea, which will then impact not only the local area, but also the State and the Nation.

After a review of the IID Petition, the State Board Notice of Public Workshop and related documents at the Planning Commission's recent public meeting, the Commission would like the State Board to consider the following significant impacts to Imperial County and its residents if the restoration of the Salton Sea does not occur in a timely manner. It is essential that a feasible restoration plan is agreed upon and funding identified. More than a decade after the QSA transfers began, no progress has been made on restoration of the Salton Sea.

- 1) The continuing reduction of the Salton Sea, the largest body of water in the State, and the newly exposed playa is of increasing concern to all of the Commissioners. Without restoration, declining water levels and increasing salinity in the Sea will have many serious consequences for our health, economy and the habitat. The declining water levels 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 Valley to suffer from heart disease, asthma, lung cancer, and other health problems.

According to The Pacific Institute Study by Michael Cohen, the impact on public health is estimated between \$21 billion and \$37 billion dollars as the public will breathe unsafe air, there will be an increased number of people suffering from heart and lung disease, worsening burden of asthma in children, shortening of an individual's life expectancy, noxious odors, increase hospitalizations, lost work and wages and diversion of funding from other local health issues.

- 2) Emissions from the exposed playa will affect the health and vitality of the land and the crops needed to supply food to the State and the nation. Imperial County relies upon its strong agricultural production which consists of over 473,000 acres of farmland. The gross production value of agricultural commodities in it is over \$2 billion annually, providing thousands of direct and indirect jobs and shipping over 1.6 million tons of winter vegetables across the world. The increased salinity will cause fields to lose productivity. Increased dust on the crops will negatively impact many of the crops and increase the time and expense to get the crops to market.
- 3) The economic impact of a dying Sea will affect the land within the Imperial Valley and will be a major burden on businesses, schools, public services, and the overall quality of life for residents in the Imperial Valley. There will be a decrease in direct recreational spending and the property values in Imperial County will be significantly reduced.
- 4) The impact to the environment will be significant as there will be loss of wetland habitat valued in California worth \$2.6 billion annually, the Salton Sea will be filled with algae, bacteria and viruses and threatened and endangered species will be killed. There will damage to the 400 species of birds that are found at the Salton Sea and other habitat will be harmed.
- 5) Anyone who has traveled recently on State Routes 86 and 111 through Imperial and Riverside Counties are fully aware of the Salton Sea's exposure of "playa" that continues to occur.

The County has consistently been designated as a "serious" PM10 non-attainment area because of the existing poor air quality and the continuing exposure of the Salton Sea's playa. This will result in an increased danger of more future restrictions on economic development within the Imperial County Salton Sea Air Basin.

On behalf of the Imperial County Planning Commission, we call upon the State 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. This Commission strongly urges your Board to hold a Workshop in Imperial County as requested by IID to allow more local participation in this matter. Along with other supporting agencies, we look forward to a positive decision by the State Board and the support for future funding of local restoration efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rudy Schaffner". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rudy Schaffner, Chairperson  
Imperial County Planning Commission

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

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