



207 West Legion Road, Brawley, CA 92227 voice 760.351.3250 ~ fax 760.351.4489

March 5, 2015

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



Subject: Comment Letter: Salton Sea

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

On behalf of Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District, I am 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 important issue for the health of those people in and around the Imperial and Coachella valleys. It is the people in and near the Salton Sea who will bear the burden and experience the most direct health costs of a failure to restore the Salton Sea.

Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District is a healthcare organization in Northern Imperial County, close and partly surrounding the Salton Sea. We provide general acute care hospitalization, emergency, a large volume of Obstetrical and Gynecologic, surgical, intensive care, and federally supported Rural Health Clinics. Currently, Pioneers is nearing capacity in our emergency services facilities and surgical services facilities. Additional space and facilities will take some time to expand. We are concerned about the increasing pressures on these facilities, at a time when we also need to fund the replacement of other portions of the hospital in preparation for seismic compliance. We are facing dramatic changes in healthcare where our attentions are focused on improving the health of our communities as demonstrated through our significant support of the Imperial County Health Authority. Such increased exposure of the Salton Sea shoreline will be counter to the efforts of the California Department of Healthcare Services to improve quality and decrease the cost of healthcare through our managed care programs. It is my understanding that the connections have been established between the particles of the exposed shore of the Salton Sea and increased pollution of the air of Imperial County. We, in Imperial County have a statistically proven high rate of asthma and allergy conditions compared to the rest of California. The continued pollution and increasingly exposed shoreline of the Salton Sea will significantly worsen the quality of life and health in our communities for generations to come.

The health of the people in the Imperial and Coachella valleys will be critically affected from the State's failure to restore the Salton Sea. 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. Both the direct financial costs (in the form of direct healthcare expenses and indirect costs associated with health care) and human costs (in terms of increased

Personally, We Care For You

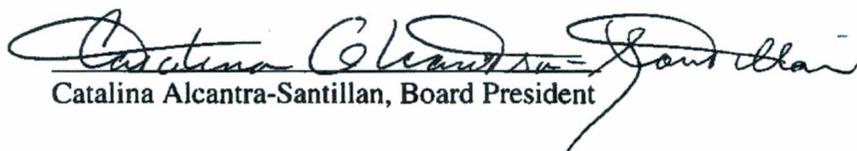
mortality, lost productivity, and so forth) will be substantial, and will be a major burden on the families, communities, businesses and local government in the Imperial and Coachella valleys. That is the harsh reality facing our region.

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 face significant public-health challenges—to be forced to bear the consequences of California’s effort to reduce its usage of Colorado River water.

Almost no progress has been made on restoration more than a decade later. 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 Salton 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.

For the sake of health in the Salton Sea region, 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,


Catalina Alcantra-Santillan, Board President


Lawrence Lewis, Chief Executive Officer
Pioneers Memorial Healthcare District

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