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(3/18/15) Public Workshop
Salton Sea
Deadline: 3/11/15 by 12:00 noon

March 9, 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:

The Imperial County Children and Families First Commission, also known as First 5 Imperial, is dedicated to working to ensure that children 0 through 5 years of age and their families are provided with opportunities to support their development and overall well-being. As the Executive Director of the Commission, I am writing to express our support for the Imperial Irrigation District's petition regarding restoration of the Salton Sea. The Board for the Imperial Irrigation District recognized in its Notice of Public Workshop, this issue is an urgent one of statewide importance. Restoration efforts for the Salton Sea will have a meaningful impact on the health and well-being of those people in and around the Imperial and Coachella valleys, particularly for our most vulnerable residents – young children. Clearly, it will be the people living 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.

The Commission provides resources that support a variety of programs dedicated to serve young children and their families. These resource target child health, early care and education, and further work to support family functioning. The Commission focuses on a number of strategic objectives based on need and priority areas identified in our Strategic Plan. For example, we are currently supporting services in several child health areas, such as asthma case management, breastfeeding/lactation education, childhood overweight and obesity, support for children with special needs, and prenatal care. A quick review of population data available through a variety of governmental organizations supports these investments, and one will clearly note how disparaging health outcomes are for children in Imperial County upon comparison to other counties in California, and the state in general. Therefore not taking advantage of this opportunity to implement a significant restoration plan for the Salton Sea will create a situation in the near future where the negative impacts to child health are exacerbated. This would certainly be a terrible blow to the State of California; a state which I believe takes pride in the opportunities available to its residents and that in light of where we stand will not hesitate to support anything that would work to sustain the integrity of its fragile ecosystems.

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



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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 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,



Julio C. Rodriguez
Executive Director

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



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