

J. Todd Finnell, Ed.D., Superintendent

March 2, 2015

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814



Subject: Comment Letter for the Restoration of the Salton Sea

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

On behalf of the Imperial County Superintendent of Schools and representing the interests of the 17 school districts throughout Imperial County, I am writing to express my support for the Imperial Irrigation District's petition regarding restoration of the Salton Sea. It is notable that the Board recognized in its Notice of Public Workshop that this issue is an urgent one of statewide importance. It is also a particularly significant issue for the students, families, and schools of the Imperial and Coachella valleys, which will bear some of the most direct and long lasting costs of failure to restore the Salton Sea.

Schools and teachers in the Salton Sea region cannot fulfill their educational mission independent of the families and communities for whom they serve. When students must deal with ongoing health issues due to the environment surrounding them, or when the local economy is struggling, our children suffer. It is for this reason that I am so concerned about the documented impacts that will result from a failure to restore the Sea.

Without restoration, declining water levels and increasing salinity at the Sea will have many serious consequences for schools and our children in the Imperial and Coachella valleys. The declining 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, including students and teachers, 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 long lasting burden placed on our residents, and most of all our children, in the Imperial and Coachella valleys. That is the harsh reality facing our region.

On behalf of our students, families, teachers, and schools, I 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.

I ask for your serious consideration in this matter. The Salton Sea serves a significant role in our ability to improve the quality of life for our families and children in Imperial County. A strong, collaborative, and focused approach to solving the current and future needs of the Sea is the only way to address this major environmental issue, for which we need your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Todd Finnell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "J. Todd" and last name "Finnell" clearly distinguishable.

J. Todd Finnell, Ed.D.
Imperial County Superintendent of Schools

LD:jtf

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