

STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0056
(916) 319-2056
FAX (916) 319-2156

E-MAIL
Assemblymember.EduardoGarcia@asm.ca.gov

Assembly California Legislature



COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
TRANSPORTATION

EDUARDO GARCIA
CHAIR OF ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON
JOBS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND THE ECONOMY
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, FIFTY-SIXTH DISTRICT

February 5, 2015

Carole D'Elia, Executive Director
Little Hoover Commission
925 L Street, Suite 805
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. D'Elia:

On behalf of the constituents of the 56th Assembly district, home of the Salton Sea ("The Sea"), I write to request that the Little Hoover Commission ("The Commission") review and make recommendations on how the State can best advance and pay for a comprehensive environmental mitigation and restoration strategy for the Sea. Though the issue has been studied and debated for years, an examination by the Commission will provide the unbiased and non-partisan type of policy analysis that is very much needed. The situation has become more urgent due to the fact that mitigation water currently delivered to the Sea under the Quantification Settlement Agreement ("QSA") will stop flowing in 2017, under the watch of the current Governor.

Background on the Salton Sea

The Sea attracts thousands of visitors annually and is very economically important to the area. As California's largest inland lake and one of its most significant ecological resources, the Sea supports a diverse wildlife habitat for over 400 species of birds and serves as a critical link on the 5,000 mile international Pacific Flyway. Unfortunately, the Sea is deteriorating rapidly and faces a bleak future if no immediate action is taken. Inevitably, a lack of restoration efforts will result in the exposure of thousands of acres of dry lakebed as the Sea dries up. Salton Sea mud contains enough arsenic and selenium to qualify for disposal in a dump reserved for the most toxic of society's trash. Chromium, zinc, lead and pesticides, including DDT, are also in the lake bottom. As the seabed becomes exposed, these chemicals attach themselves to sediments and become airborne, posing a significant public health threat to the over 400,000 residents residing in close proximity to the Sea. Windblown dust emissions from as much as 100,000 acres of exposed lakebed will dramatically worsen the already poor air quality in Southern

California. The incidence of asthma, heart and lung disease and even premature death among the working-class population of affected areas is expected to increase exponentially in the years ahead. The deterioration of the sea also imperils the region's largely agricultural economy, which accounts for nearly 50 percent of all local employment, not to mention the viability of the area's multi-billion dollar recreation and tourism industries.

Mitigation and Restoration of the Salton Sea

Under the QSA, the State of California agreed to assume sole responsibility for mitigating the impacts of the water transfer on the Sea beyond the first \$133 million in costs, including the cost of restoring the Sea to historical levels for fish and wildlife, a potentially multi-billion effort. Although the QSA imposes a number of requirements on the State related to mitigation, it does not impose requirements related to restoration. However, by performing restoration activities now that are also designed to reduce the need to undertake mitigation activities in the future, the State could potentially decrease future mitigation costs. To address restoration of the Salton Sea and the State's QSA related mitigation responsibilities, the Legislature required the Resources Agency to evaluate several alternatives for restoring the Salton Sea, which the Resources Agency presented in its Preferred Alternative Report. Nonetheless, more than eight years after the report was submitted, none of the alternatives have been fully funded.

Once again, I strongly believe that all parties could benefit from a decision by the Commission to take a full and deliberative look at these and related issues. Though the costs of any significant action at the Sea are likely to be high, I fear the costs of inaction will undoubtedly be much higher.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my office with any additional questions regarding this letter. I look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Eduardo Garcia

State Assemblymember, 56th District