



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY ON THE LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION STUDY OF THE
CRISIS AT THE SALTON SEA**

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I am pleased to address the Little Hoover Commission on the study to understand the crises at the Salton Sea and to discuss the State of California's obligation to environmental mitigation and restoration of the sea. My name is Mary Resvaloso. I am the Chairwoman of the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (TMDCI) which was established by President Ulysses S. Grant on May 15, 1876. The Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (Tribe) is a Sovereign Indian Nation and a federally recognized Indian Tribe. Its Tribal land base was established by Executive Order of the United States Federal government as the Torres Martinez Reservation. The tribe's lands cover 24,822 acres, almost 40 square miles of checker-boarded parcels in California from La Quinta to Salton City, along State Highway 86. Approximately, 11,000 of the 24,822 acres are located under the Salton Sea. The Reservation lands straddle Imperial and Riverside Counties and lie about 50 miles north of the US – Mexico International Border. Temperatures can reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer.

There are approximately 900 enrolled tribal members with approximately 560 members over 18 years of age and approximately 77% of the Tribal membership living off the Reservation and 23% of the members living in the Salton Sea community. The majority of members ages 55 and older live within 100 miles of the Reservation.

The language of the Tribe is Cahuilla. It belongs to the linguistic family of the US Southwest identified as Uto-Aztecan. Cahuilla was originally known as Kawia, meaning 'leader or boss', but today it is referred to as Chem Háwawah, 'our language'. There are presently a total of nine Southern California Tribes with languages that are of Cahuilla descent and who are also struggling to preserve and maintain their language, lands, culture and traditions.

The TMDCI host a number of administrative governmental departments including, but not limited to, Social Welfare and Child Welfare Services, Planning, Administration, Fiscal, Procurement, Security, TANF, and the Water Resources Department, which is spearheading my Tribe's efforts regarding the Salton Sea crisis.

It is the mission of the TMDCI to empower their people to achieve a better way of life and maintain tribal integrity and honor through responsive government. This is why I am excited to have the opportunity to address the Commission since our mission's to promote efficiency, economy and improved government services are closely aligned.

Effects of the Receding Salton Sea on the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians

The impact, of the receding Salton Sea, is a direct threat to the Torres Martinez Tribe. Torres Martinez is the largest private landowner of property in and around the Salton Sea. As a Tribal people we value the land, air and language and believe these are interconnected through our culture and traditions. As the looming crisis at the Salton Sea worsens the Tribe becomes more vulnerable to the ongoing destruction of us as a Tribe and people. The Salton Sea area is part of the traditional land base of the Tribe and as the land is impacted our culture, traditions and language are also negatively impacted. The Tribe always plans for seven (7) generations into the future, this is our aboriginal homeland and it must be protected for our future generations.

The receding Salton Sea and subsequent increase in exposed lakebed will severely impact the Tribe and surrounding communities. Dead fish and noxious odors have degraded the once thriving beach and

wildlife habitat areas at the Sea. The volatilizing sediments in the Sea bed, includes 100 years of pesticides, selenium, and other problematic particles which will likely become airborne. As airborne particles increase, we are seeing a direct increase in asthma and other pulmonary illnesses. The population around the Salton Sea is disproportionately low income, uninsured and with limited political representation with extremely limited economic and/or educational opportunities. Unfortunately, the receding Salton Sea is disproportionately confronting the people and places with fewest social, economic, and political resources to address these hazards. This crisis poses a major threat to human health in one of California's most economically stressed regions.

In some wind conditions, airborne pollutants and stench of decomposing organic matter, including dead fish and decomposing algae, from the Salton Sea may travel hundreds of miles, potentially affecting millions of people throughout Southern California. On September 11, 2012 a powerful wind storm brought the stench of dead fish to the densely populated Los Angeles basin. As the Sea recedes, we expect the stench and airborne particles will become a more common occurrence to our Northern neighbors of Los Angeles County.

The visible impacts of the receding Salton Sea are clear. The invisible looming impacts on public health and justice are more difficult to ascertain on an already environmentally and socially vulnerable area. As the Sea recedes we are experiencing an associated reduction of agricultural activities and reduction of property values. *The Pacific Institute Report: Hazard's Toll--The Cost of Inaction at the Salton Sea, September 2014* estimates the property devaluation to be at least \$400 million and potentially as high as \$7 billion. These outcomes are once again impacting a part of California which is already economically and socially vulnerable.

The Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians are acutely and personally experienced in issues of social and environmental justice or perhaps injustice is more accurate. Nonetheless, I am here as the Chairwoman of the Tribe to reach out to you as a partner and member of the Salton Sea Authority. This is not only a matter of social and environmental justice but part of the struggle for the ongoing survival and wellbeing of the Torres Martinez Tribe.

Proposed Salton Sea solutions

The Salton Sea is of great significance to the Tribe culturally, economically and socially, this is our aboriginal homeland and protecting and honoring the land is important to the Tribe and our future generations. The Tribe is a member of the Salton Sea Authority and we support the efforts of the Authority and stand ready to become stronger partners with the State of California and Federal Government to help mitigate the crisis of the receding Salton Sea. We understand the complexity of a solution and understand a panacea is unlikely. The Federal Government has a trust obligation toward the Torres Martinez Tribe; and, we are here to stand together with the State and local agencies to effectively respond to the Salton Sea crisis.

The following is a short outline of what is important and what the Tribe supports:

- The Tribe supports the Salton Sea Authority proposed Enhanced Circulation Design Plan.

- The Tribe supports the incorporation of representatives from the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG), State Water Resources Department, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation to the Salton Sea Authority Board.
- The Tribe supports making the Salton Sea Authority the lead agency for the rehabilitation of the Salton Sea and the implementation of conservation projects.
- Various values and interest have influenced the proposed approaches to the restoration and mitigation of the Salton Sea crisis. The Tribe recommends starting with a set of common efforts based around habitat value for birds and wildlife generally. More than 400 species of birds use the Salton Sea, including a large number of special status species, protecting their habitat is important to the Tribe and our future generations.
- The Tribe is interested in using renewable solar or wind energy to extract underground non-potable water to create shallow marsh areas and conducting soil improvements by using golf course green waste to lay over exposed playa lands.
- The Tribe supports the adoption of a tiered solutions approach prioritizing habitat protection with ongoing assessment and evaluation helping to identify best practices with low operational and maintenance cost for future projects.

Our generation has the responsibility to find and take action to solve the challenges of the Salton Sea crisis. The Torres Martinez Tribe is ready to work together as partners with all the interested parties and in particular through the leadership provided by the Salton Sea Authority.

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