



February 18, 2015

The Honorable Felicia Marcus
Chair
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I St.
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for Imperial Irrigation District Request to Convene a Collaborative Process

Dear Chairwoman Marcus:

On behalf of Audubon California, Defenders of Wildlife, the Pacific Institute and Sierra Club California, we write to thank you and the State Water Resources Control Board for scheduling a public workshop on March 18 regarding the status of the Salton Sea and Revised Order WRO 2002-0013. We support the Imperial Irrigation District's (IID) request to your board to convene a series of stakeholder meetings to discuss the current and future status of the State of California's restoration efforts at the Salton Sea and discuss whether or not Revised Order WRO 2001-0013 should be amended. We are encouraged that the Board has scheduled this first workshop. We plan to participate in the workshop and will submit written comments in advance, as requested.

As you know, the Salton Sea is our state's largest lake and one of its most significant natural and environmental resources. The Salton Sea provides a diverse array of wildlife habitats that support several threatened and endangered species, as well as more than 400 species of resident and migratory birds, and serves as a critical link on the Pacific Flyway. The Sea is also home to the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge and the Salton Sea State Recreation Area, both serving as recreational destinations and attracting thousands of visitors annually.

Mitigation water currently delivered to the Salton Sea as required by the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) and the Board's Revised WRO 2002-13 will stop at the end of 2017. This will greatly accelerate the decline of the lake's surface water level, roughly tripling the lake's salinity within a dozen years, and will expose tens of thousands of acres of highly emissive lakebed, as documented in Resource Agency's 2007 [PEIR](#). Not only is this an issue of statewide importance, it is an issue of the utmost importance to the residents of the Imperial and Coachella Valleys because it is they who will have to live with the lasting impacts of a dying Salton Sea. If no immediate course of action is put in place, the negative impacts to the environment, public health and the local economy will be substantial. The Pacific Institute's recent [Hazard's Toll: The Costs of Inaction at the Salton Sea](#) estimates that the total costs of these negative impacts could run into the tens of billions of dollars over the next thirty years.

The State of California has failed to meet its responsibilities under the QSA and the accompanying legislation as well as to the people and wildlife resources of California. While the State of California has

benefited greatly from the QSA, as detailed in IID's petition, since the release of the Resource Agency's PEIR almost eight years ago, the state has repeatedly deferred and delayed any effort to undertake the restoration of the Salton Sea. Unfortunately, as time quickly runs out, it appears that high-level state engagement in the Salton Sea will require the intervention of your Board to ensure that the state lives up to its commitments. Without timely intervention, the devastating impacts on the Salton Sea, its fish and wildlife resources, and the counties of Imperial and Riverside will likely lead to an unraveling of the QSA and all of its benefits to urban Southern California as well as the rest of the state. A water supply interruption for much of coastal Southern California will ripple throughout the state and create additional pressures on our already strained state water system.

Such an outcome is not in anybody's interest. Your Board's involvement in this critical issue will raise its profile and encourage participation and commitment from all stakeholders involved. Again, we thank you and the Board for scheduling this first workshop and encourage you to convene a series of stakeholder meetings that include not only the QSA parties and the Salton Sea Authority, but also those stakeholders representing fish and wildlife, water quality, and public health interests. It is imperative that this process results in a credible, feasible plan for funding and implementing a timely, appropriate plan for the Salton Sea.

Sincerely,



Michael Cohen
Senior Associate
Pacific Institute



Kimberly Delfino
California Program Director
Defenders of Wildlife



Michael Lynes
Director of Public Policy
Audubon California



Kathryn Phillips
Director
Sierra Club California

cc: Thomas Howard, State Water Resources Control Board
Steve Benson, Imperial Irrigation District
Roger Shintaku, Salton Sea Authority