



San Diego County Water Authority

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December 30, 2015

VIA EMAIL

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OTHER REPRESENTATIVE

County of San Diego

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk of the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov

RE: Comment Letter: Salton Sea

Dear Ms. Townsend:

The San Diego County Water Authority (Water Authority) respectfully submits these written comments to the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) for consideration at its January 5, 2016 public workshop regarding the status of actions identified by the Salton Sea Task Force.

The Water Authority advocated for the creation of the Salton Sea Task Force by the Administration as a critical step in identifying and implementing a realistic restoration plan at the Salton Sea. We have been an active participant in recent Task Force meetings and support its coordinated multi-agency approach to addressing restoration. Over the past decade we have worked closely with Bruce Wilcox, first in his role with the Imperial Irrigation District on Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) matters and now as Assistant Secretary for Salton Sea Policy, and believe his knowledge along with an invigorated commitment by the State to address restoration obligations at the Sea can lead to tangible progress.

Legislation signed in October 2015 (AB 1095, Garcia) provides key milestones for the State to fulfill its restoration obligations. The legislation tasks the Natural Resources Agency with providing a list of "shovel ready" projects, which is critical to move restoration forward in a timely manner. In addition, the Water Authority supports the accelerated timeline identified by the Task Force to create up to 12,000 acres of wetlands and shoreline restoration over the next five years, and for work to begin on another 25,000 acres of restoration to begin by 2020. Further, we support utilization of a science advisory committee to provide expertise into development of the State's Salton Sea Management Concept.

Funding remains a key obstacle in developing and implementing a feasible restoration program. In the short term, the State's 4,000 acre Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) project is the most important project moving forward. The SCH currently serves as the only permitted and immediately implementable deep water fish habitat project, which is of critical importance as a

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stop-over along the Pacific Flyway for fish-eating birds. While current available funding will enable about 600 acres of the project to be built in the very near future, Proposition 1 Water Bond money must be allocated to future project phases. The Water Bond has \$475 million set aside for State settlement agreement projects, including projects at the Sea. We must seize this opportunity to utilize that funding at the Sea to advance truly “shovel ready” projects such as the SCH. As other projects in the State’s Salton Sea Management Concept advance from “conceptual” to shovel ready, incremental Water Bond money should be allocated in a similar manner.

Additionally, it is imperative that the State make the best use of the Salton Sea Restoration Fund. The Water Authority and its QSA Joint Powers Authority (JPA) funding partners are providing seed money – nearly \$70 million through 2047 – to move restoration efforts forward. This investment in restoration, in addition to the nearly \$100 million in Proposition 84, Proposition 50, and Water Resources Development Act funding for the Sea, must be freed-up and immediately applied to projects identified by the Task Force.

Salton Sea restoration is a State responsibility, as per 2003 legislation, and the Water Authority is pleased to see a renewed commitment on the part of the State toward that goal. The Water Authority will continue to faithfully fund mitigation efforts tied to the QSA Water Transfers and will continue to advocate for a more sustainable future at the Sea. At the same time, the State must be proactive to address the larger issue of restoration, to protect human health, enhance recreational activities, and to maintain the Sea as an important resource in the Pacific Flyaway for migratory birds.

We thank you for your time and consideration of these important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maureen A. Stapleton', written in a cursive style.

Maureen A. Stapleton
General Manager