



May 20, 2020

**RE: Public Comment on item 5C, 5/21/20 SSA board meeting**

Dear Board Members,

On behalf of Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, I'd like to comment on item 5C: Status of the EIFD in Riverside County. First, I recognize the intent that the Board and the County have with establishing the EIFD to support the revitalization of the Salton Sea. However, there are a few concerns that we would like to raise which I outline in this letter.

**Community Engagement and Outreach**

We understand that the EIFD has already been approved by Riverside County and that there was one workshop conducted in North Shore on October 15, 2019. However, both the County and the SSA should be and should've been conducting more robust public education and engagement on this topic before COVID-19.

Given that the EIFD will draw resources from throughout a broad area, including the unincorporated communities of Thermal, Oasis, Mecca, and North Shore, it is critical that the residents paying into this new funding mechanism have a role in determining projects and overseeing expenditures.

Many residents in the ECV are unaware of this new funding mechanism and do not yet understand how it might impact or benefit them. We suggest developing educational material that can be shared with residents in both english and spanish, conduct more workshops at accessible times and locations once feasibly possible, and that there be a public input process on what projects can be funded through the EIFD in relation to the Salton Sea and other infrastructure.

**Perimeter Lake Project**

According to the staff report, the Perimeter Lake Project has been approved and endorsed by the SSA and by tribal and city councils from both Imperial and Coachella Valleys for investments from EIFD revenues. However, much like with the EIFD, there has been very little public engagement on the development of this project. We do not contest its potential to stabilize the shoreline, provide dust suppression, and habitat conservation, but this project has not gone

through the appropriate public participation process with the communities surrounding the Sea. It is critical that we work together and in partnership and collaboration with community residents to ensure that we develop and implement projects at the Sea that prioritize public health, habitat conservation, and other multi-benefit infrastructure that can be enjoyed by the local community. These efforts should be coordinated with the public participation process for the EIFD.

Working with community residents in the Eastern Coachella Valley should be a top priority for the SSA and Riverside County. Residents have been engaged in the SSMP and DSAP public input processes and have elevated the need to prioritize dust suppression projects near North Shore that also bring about different recreational and infrastructure benefits to the region. As noted above, community residents contribute to the funding source and must have a say in how the dollars are spent. We expect for more outreach and engagement on the EIFD and Perimeter Lake Project to be conducted and for surrounding communities to have a role in EIFD decision-making in order for investments to reflect community priorities and benefits. Until this is done effectively, progress on both of these items should be placed on hold.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Zaragoza  
Senior Policy Advocate