

# Strategic Priorities and Values

A framework for the 2021-2022 Budget Process

The Salton Sea Authority was created to exercise the common power of directing and coordinating actions relating to the improvement of water quality; to stabilize water elevation and to enhance recreational and economic development of the Salton Sea and other beneficial uses, recognizing the importance of the Salton Sea for the continuation of the dynamic agricultural economy in the Imperial and Riverside Counties.

The Authority exercises its strong local leadership in consultation and collaboration with its Project Partners<sup>1</sup> and Stakeholders<sup>2</sup> to facilitate the transition of the Sea and region from what it once was to what it sustainably can become. To accomplish this metamorphosis, plans, policies, and projects have been developed and are being developed to address immediate impacts to human health and safety, and to restore critical habitat lost to the declining Sea. These landscape-level projects involve hundreds- and in some cases thousands of acres of wetlands and mitigation of emissive soils. Plans are also being developed and projects are advancing to address community-level impacts at the Sea.

This document was framed by the [Authority's governing documents](#), as amended, and directed by California law, including [AB71 \(Perez\)](#). Though the process was never finalized, the [Strategic Plan](#) exercise which took place over the past two years and the work papers which resulted therefrom directionally informed and contributed greatly to this effort. It is intended to provide the Board with a sense of priority of the Authority as assessed by Staff. Once validated or revised by the Board it will be used to develop a fiscal plan for the 2021/2022 budget cycle, which is expected to be presented to the Board in draft form at the next meeting on March 25th, with the intent of finalizing the 2021/2022 budget on April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

## What We Do

In its pursuit to align Stakeholders and resources to protect human health, revitalize the environment and wildlife, stimulate the economy, and enhance recreational opportunities for the region the Authority engages in a wide array of activities:

**Coordinate / Facilitate** – As the local leader on matters relating to the Salton Sea and region, the Authority through its Members and its Project Partners, with meaningful engagement with and input from Stakeholders, identifies opportunities and challenges, and develops plans and strategies to address community and Stakeholder needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Project Partners – for the purpose of this memo Project Partners refers to agencies, corporations, and/or persons who work in collaboration and consultation with the Authority (with robust input from the Stakeholders) on the conceptualization, design, funding, construction, and operation of projects to address the challenges and opportunities of the Sea and region.

<sup>2</sup> Stakeholders represent the myriad of individuals and organizations affected by the aging of the Sea and are best able to inform the plans for the future.

**Communicate / Educate** – As the local authority on matters relating to the Salton Sea, the Authority provides clear and transparent communications to its Members, Project Partners, and Stakeholders to inform its deliberative process and manage Stakeholder expectations.

**Advocate** – on behalf of its Members and Project Partners, and for the benefit of its Stakeholders, the Authority advocates locally and regionally, as well as at the State and Federal level to advance policies and secure resources to pursue its mission.

**Administrate** – on its own behalf and in trust for its Project Partners, the Authority handles all its financial and business dealings with precision and integrity.

The Authority operates for the general benefit of its Members, with costs and benefits deemed to be mutually shared. Certain projects of the Authority, referred to as “Specific Projects”, may be advanced by certain Members from time to time. At the election of the Member or Members and with approval of the Board, separate project budgets will be created for such Specific Projects, segregating discreet project costs and administrative burdens for allocation to those targeted projects. Though these projects are uniquely classified, it is recognized that these efforts and all efforts of the Authority nonetheless benefit the Members and Stakeholders generally, and each Specific Project budget is developed based on its unique facts and circumstances, as approved by the Board.

## **How We Do It**

General duties of the Authority include all general and administrative activities, along with the following Stakeholder benefit efforts:

**Implementation of the State’s 10-Year plan** – provide consultation and coordination with the State on landscape-scaled projects to address wetlands losses and mitigate air and water quality degradation. In collaboration with Project Partners and informed by regional authorities in the field, concerns are properly identified and mitigated through the development of plans and projects that ensure the sustainability and improved quality of life for communities of the region, as well as restoration of wetlands and habitat lost to the declining Sea.

**Long Term Planning** – In consultation and coordination with the State, and informed by extensive Stakeholder input, develop a long term, sustainable plan for the Sea and region that facilitates quality of life for the communities of today and tomorrow.

**Communications and Education** –providing current relevant information on the risks, the remedies, the plans, and the projects of the Authority and its Project Partners is critical to the elimination of “stigma” associated with the Sea and region. In addition to being responsive to inquiries regarding projects or concerns at the Sea and around the region, this effort also includes providing, facilitating, or participating in tours, conferences, and other events that draw attention to the needs and highlight the opportunities of the region.

**Economic Development** – provide general support in pursuit of expanded economic opportunities for the people of the region. To the extent this effort results in opportunities with specificity at the project level and resources dictate, it could spawn “Specific Projects”. A diverse array of regional economic development opportunities, from Agriculture, Energy, Tourism, Mining & Minerals, and International Trade, among others, represent targets of opportunity to define the communities of the future.

**Legislative Advocacy** – The Authority actively advocates at the local, regional, state, and federal level for policies and resources to ensure that the challenges are addressed, and the opportunities are timely pursued and secured. This is critical work of the Authority for the benefit of its Members, its Project Partners, and its vast group of Stakeholder.

**Community Needs Assessments** – “Community is our Strength” was a theme highlighted in the Strategic Planning process, and nothing could be more true. The Authority asserts local leadership because of the authority vested in it by the communities served. In order to do this, each community affected by the decline of the Sea should reasonably expect a clear understanding of the risks to that community from the decline of the Sea, and how those risks will be mitigated by our Project Partners. In addition, to provide for livable communities of the future, it will be necessary to assess not only how the economic, social, and recreational climates in those communities have declined over time (at least in part due to the degradation of the proximate ecosystem), but what resources can be brought to bear that will allow the revitalizing of those communities to livable, sustainable neighborhoods for generations to come.

## **SPECIFIC PROJECTS**

These current and planned projects are either being advanced by a Member Agency or agencies, or are so identified because of certain unique attributes of the project, typically funding mechanisms and increased administrative burden.

### **New River**

*"The sewage from Mexicali and Calexico both empty into New River which flows into Salton Sea. The program that would be involved in purifying the water would be a purifying plant installed at the border with sufficient capacity to take care of the sewage both from Mexicali and Calexico. .... The health authorities of the State studied the matter with the City of Calexico and California County Health authorities. The City of Calexico asked the Imperial Irrigation District to make an investigation for them to see whether there was any machinery of a federal nature that could be used to meet this problem. After an investigation in Washington it was found that no machinery or facilities were available at the time, whereupon recommendation by the International Boundary Commission and the Secretary of State, a bill was introduced in Congress to create the machinery to take care of situations of this nature."*

Joint Interim Committee on Water Problems,  
organized under Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 66,  
Chapter 194, **1949** Regular Session.

While many in the region have been frustrated by the delays in implementing State-promised solutions to impacts associated with recent declines of the Sea, one challenge in particular deserves particular attention. As evidence of the aforementioned outtake from the 1951 Cesspool report to the Legislature on Water Problems, residents in the City of Calexico have been waiting generations for a sustainable solution. It is time. The Salton Sea Authority advocated for and successfully secured \$10 Million in Proposition 68 funding, and other resources have been recently secured. Although this project lies technically outside of the clearly defined Salton Sea Authority boundaries, its impact and importance to the Sea and region is without question. The Authority will continue to work with Project Partners for the benefit of the Stakeholders to ensure a project which sustainably addresses this longstanding international crisis once and for all.

### **Desert Shores**

This community situated in Imperial County has been greatly impacted by the decline of the Sea. The “finger lakes” portion of the neighborhood has all but dried up, and the standing water therein requires prompt mitigation. Other adjacent mitigation, habitat, and recreational opportunities will be explored.

### **North Lake Demonstration Project**

A pivotal part of the entire perimeter lake complex, this 160 acre “Demonstration Project” (so called) will test design concepts and resources for future construction phases of much larger impoundment to create much needed deep-water habitat. The resulting project will also manifest in the revitalization of county and state facilities which will benefit North Shore area locals and seasonal tourists alike.

Other projects which at present are not viewed as “Special Projects but may evolve as such during the budget process include:

**Red Hill Bay** – The Authority has no formal role in the current discussions regarding the future of this important project but could potentially provide consultation and coordination services to the Project at the direction of the Board and in cooperation of the Project Partners.

**Whitewater Delta Wetlands** - Several alternatives are being explored to take advantage of a small USDA grant of funds available for wetlands development on private lands. The Authority is working with Members and numerous Project Partners to develop a potential scope for the Board and the State to consider.

## **Conclusion**

While it is impossible to anticipate every eventuality that may occur in any fiscal year, this memorandum projects the work Staff believes the Authority will undertake for the upcoming fiscal year. As discussed, this scoping exercise will be translated into an operating budget articulating the resources (fiscal and otherwise) necessary to accomplish these goals. To the extent the currently available resources (based on historical Member commitments) do not cover the full scope of effort outlined herein, Staff will recommend a priority use of resources – with some work possibly delayed and some needs potentially unmet - until adequate funding is secured.

Staff recommends that the Board direct staff to utilize this framework to initiate the 2021/2022 budget process or provide alternative guidance in this regard.