

COACHELLA VALLEY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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June 13, 2023

The Honorable Luz Rivas
Chair, Assembly Natural Resources Committee
1020 N Street, Room 164
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 583 - Oppose

Dear Assemblymember Rivas,

As Executive Director of the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), I am writing in opposition to SB 583 (Padilla), this bill would create a Salton Sea Conservancy which would create redundancy and potentially stall important projects that are already underway at the Salton Sea.

CVCC is a joint powers authority created to implement the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP). The CVMSHCP is a nationally recognized, 75-year plan to conserve 240,000 acres of open space in Riverside County in order to protect 27 plant and animal species including big horn sheep, desert tortoise and the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard. As one of the fastest growing areas of the state, the CVMSHCP provides a regional vision for balanced growth to meet the requirements of federal and state endangered species laws, while promoting enhanced opportunities for recreation, tourism and job growth.

Our region covers the northern portion of the Salton Sea, as such we are involved in the complex issues facing the restoration efforts of the Sea and the numerous stakeholders that are involved.

In 2013, AB 71 (Perez) established a framework for Salton Sea restoration and designated the California Natural Resources Agency Secretary (CNRA) as the state's lead for this work. AB 71 also directed the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Water Resources to undertake certain restoration efforts. Lastly, AB 71 directed the CNRA to undertake restoration activities in consultation and coordination with the Salton Sea Authority, and to seek input from the authority on specific components of restoration, such as recreation, habitat, and economic development opportunities. The proposed Salton Sea Conservancy would take over most, if not all, of these responsibilities. In addition, the proposed conservancy would overlap with an existing conservancy, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, the implications of this are unknown and likely have not been fully considered.

The CNRA has invested heavily in creating a team solely dedicated to Salton Sea, and has recently increased staff and technical expertise to this issue. This work has been conducted in partnership with the Salton Sea Authority. We are concerned that creating a new conservancy will add unnecessary redundancy and create another layer of government that can impede the momentum and progress made thus far on the SSMP and Long-Range Plan.

For the reasons noted, we respectfully request your "no" vote when SB 583 is heard in your committee. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly at 760-346-1127 or at tkirk@cvag.org.

Sincerely,

Tom Kirk
Executive Director