



June 17, 2024

Senator Ben Allen  
1021 O Street, Room 6610  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Monique Limon  
1021 O Street, Room 6510  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Lena Gonzalez  
1021 O Street, Room 7720  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: SB 867- Drought, Flood, and Water Resilience, Wildfire and Forest Resilience, Coastal Resilience, Extreme Heat Mitigation, Biodiversity and Nature-Based Climate Solutions, Climate, Smart Agriculture, Park Creation and Outdoor Access, and Clean Energy Bond Act of 2024 – SUPPORT IF AMENDED**

Dear Senators Allen, Limon and Leader Gonzalez:

We write to urge you to not allow a climate bond proposal to move forward without adequate resources to fund the state's legal and moral obligations to the Salton Sea. We understand and appreciate the pressure you are under to reduce the overall size of the bond, but ask you to please, at a minimum, mirror the Assembly's proposal to include \$240 million for the Salton Sea, with a portion of those dollars set aside for the Salton Sea Authority (Authority) to address local public health and environmental impacts associated with state and federal water conservation measures which significantly affect disadvantaged communities in our region.

The \$100 million currently being contemplated by the Senate is not even enough to cover the \$119 million the legislature voted to "shift" to the climate bond as part of last year's budget. Moreover, it is wholly inadequate to cover the state's ongoing obligations to the Salton Sea region under the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA), recently adopted federal Colorado River water conservation measures, or the state's cost-share for projects that will be identified by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Salton Sea Feasibility Study.

Over the past several years, the State has made progress in meeting its legal obligation to mitigate the health and environmental challenges arising from the QSA, the state facilitated transfer of water from the Imperial Irrigation District to the San Diego Water

Authority. To ensure the success of this transfer, the Legislature codified the agreement (Stats 2003, Chapters 611, 612, 613) and authorized the State to enter associated contracts to undertake the restoration of the Salton Sea ecosystem. That legislation provides that the State assumes “unconditional liability” to mitigate the impact of the QSA transfer on the Salton Sea and surrounding communities.

To date, the State has begun work on the Species Conservation Habitat Project, vegetation enhancement and dust suppression projects, and preliminary work on the North Lake Pilot Demonstration Project. In addition, the State, in partnership with the Authority as joint local sponsors, agreed to fund half the cost of the Corps Salton Sea Feasibility Study, which when completed is expected to identify a comprehensive plan for sustainable Salton Sea restoration. Once complete, projects identified by the study will be authorized for 65% federal funding, a historic level of federal Salton Sea investment.

While we acknowledge the State’s recent progress, the Salton Sea has continued to deteriorate, outpacing the State’s ability to meet its QSA obligations. In 2017, the State Water Board issued Water Order 2017-0134 (Order) directing the State to complete annual acreage of both habitat and dust-suppression projects on 29,800 acres of exposed playa. But since the issuance of this order, the State has been unable to meet the annual acreage mandate required by the Order.

While the federal government recently committed to provide up to \$250 million to address some of the impacts from agreements which allow the Imperial Irrigation District to conserve an additional 250,000 acre feet (AF) of water, it is not anticipated that this funding will be adequate to address the impacts of both the short and long-term water conservation measures now under consideration by Reclamation and the Colorado River basin states.

In view of the State’s inability to timely meet its QSA obligations and the additional challenges posed by federal Colorado River water conservation efforts, the public health and environmental crisis facing the Salton Sea and the surrounding communities is poised to accelerate. These challenges are of a scale that cannot be addressed through piecemeal investments. While we understand the desire of policymakers to reduce the size of the bond, we submit that the challenges facing the Salton Sea quantitatively and qualitatively justify a robust investment. After all, the deterioration of the Sea is a direct result of agreements and commitments made by the State and that the State is legally obligated to uphold.


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Thank you for your consideration of our request as you negotiate the final legislation authorizing the bond that will be placed before voters.

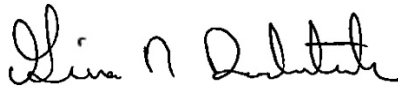
Sincerely,



Altrena Santillanes  
President



Castulo Estrada  
Vice President



Gina Dockstader  
Secretary



Yxstian Gutierrez  
Treasurer

cc:

Senator Steve Padilla  
Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia  
Assemblymember Lori Wilson  
Grant Mack, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of the Governor  
Samantha Arthur, Deputy Secretary for Salton Sea Policy, CNRA