Salton Sea Authority

Memorandum

To: Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors

From: G. Patrick O'Dowd, Executive Director /GM

Date: November 14, 2024

Re: Health Assurance Framework

For some time this Board has been focused on and actively discussing the impacts to human health and safety resulting from the changes taking place at the Salton Sea (Sea). To that end, working with and through our member agencies, in coordination with our federal and state partners, and in collaboration with affected local stakeholders, staff has been in diligent pursuit of a defensible framework of understanding and assurance that the changes taking place at the Sea are not causing or increasing risks to human health and safety.
Those changes derive from many contributing causes. Some reflecting the predictable evolution of the Sea is experiencing as a geologic sump, which were anticipated at least three quarters of a century ago. Other changes reflect a more recent phenomenon resulting from the acceleration of those predictable changes from increased conservation, and additional risks not previously anticipated possibly attributable to the chemical and biological changes taking place in more recent years.

Plans and studies to address the changes at the Sea were being discussed and developed as far back as the late '60s and early 70's (and likely sooner), but no projects were advanced during the whole of the 20th century. Even when the first transfer of approximately 100,000 acre-feet was implemented through conservation investments in 1989, impacts to the Sea were not fully considered or mitigated. More recently, the Quantification Settlement Agreement signed in 2003, and the most recent System Conservation Implementation Agreement executed earlier this year, attempted to assess the impacts from these accelerated conservation measures. But even in their best efforts, including the integration of an adaptive management plan to address the unanticipated, the scope and scale of impacts at the Sea are so significant that any deviation from estimates left unmitigated could produce significant, potentially dire, consequences to those most exposed to those unmitigated impacts.

As a part of its commitment and responsibility under the QSA, IID has implemented a "Salton Sea Air Quality Mitigation Program" (AQMP) which was developed provide a comprehensive, science-based, adaptive approach to address air quality mitigation requirements associated with the transfer of conserved water. Each component of the

program is used to identify, prioritize, and guide implementation for dust control measures on exposed Salton Sea playa. Details of the program are available to the public at SaltonSeaProgram.com. In addition, the local air boards, environmental justice stakeholders, and even the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians have active monitoring programs around the Sea. And universities, including UCR, UCI, and others, have been researching health effects of the changing Sea for decades.

The State of California, through the implementation of its Monitoring Implementation Program, it has endeavored to aggregate these study efforts. And though the program is voluntary in nature and does not yet specifically target research in a particular area of concern, it has the potential to be a useful tool for data retention and cost avoidance potentially resulting from lost knowledge or duplicative effort. In addition, we understand that Pacific Institute is looking at the full spectrum of health influencers throughout the region, including but not limited to changes at the Sea. This should prove useful in assigning responsibility for implementing solutions to reduce the potential for health risks over time.

It is also instructive to look to the mitigation efforts implemented in the Owens Valley by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, where over the past 20 years they have invested over $2.5 billion in addressing PM^{10} exposures in a region $1/3^{rd}$ the size of the Salton Sea. The initial monitoring of exposures included the installation of over 200 air monitors – 1 every square kilometer – to map and develop an understanding of risk. In addition, spotters were physically situated in the hills on either side of the valley to locate and identify any emissive activity, and satellite imagery is produced every 5 days to determine the adequacy of playa coverage. The local air board has the authority to significantly fine LADWP for daily noncompliance, and a robust community monitoring program which provides texts and phone calls to impacted community members any time an issue of concern develops.

The Salton Sea Authority (Authority) has been pursuing a pathway to align all regional stakeholders engaged in monitoring, testing, studying, and communicating regional health risks, so that the community members can know that their interests are being guarded and their families are being protected from potential negative impacts associated with the changing ecosystem. This work should also be useful in informing efforts by State, federal, and other stakeholders implementing projects around the Sea in ensuring that their efforts are being prioritized in a manner reflective of the risk.

Recommendation:

Subject to further board direction, Staff plans to continue work in this regard, integrating findings into public relations efforts under way and informing the project being defined by the Authority/DWR/USACE feasibility study now well under way.