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September 10, 2010

Via electronic mail & hand delivery

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 51 -- SUPPORT

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

On behalf of the following undersigned organizations representing environmental, hunting and fishing interests, we write to respectfully urge you to sign SB 51 (Ducheny). This important legislation sets forth the implementing structure for the Salton Sea restoration effort. SB 51 is the product of nearly three years of work and discussion between all of the various interests involved in Salton Sea restoration and reflects a balanced approach for integrating local and statewide interests into the implementation of the Salton Sea Restoration plan.

Salton Sea restoration is critical to protect globally significant wildlife habitat, air quality and water quality. The Salton Sea ecosystem provides habitat for more than 400 bird species and the endangered desert pupfish. The Sea also prevents dangerous amounts of dust pollution from blowing off exposed seabed – dust pollution that could be much greater than the pollution at Owens Lake. Preventing that dust hazard is critical to protecting public health and the billion-dollar agriculture industry in the surrounding Coachella and Imperial Valleys.

The Legislature recognized the importance of Salton Sea restoration in 2003 when it included the requirement to restore the Sea as part of the 2003 Quantification Settlement Agreement on the Colorado River. State law required that restoration provide the maximum feasible attainment of the following objectives:

- Restoration of long-term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for the historic levels and diversity of fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea.
- Elimination of air quality impacts from the restoration projects.
- Protection of water quality.¹

SB 51 establishes the Salton Sea Restoration Council as an agency in the Natural Resources Agency to oversee the restoration of the Salton Sea. It will bring efficiency, responsibility and focus to the effort to restore the Salton Sea. The Salton Sea Restoration Council will operate within existing dedicated funding and ensure a critical balancing and integration among stakeholders at the local and state levels.

Time is of the essence for Salton Sea restoration. The Sea is shrinking and our time to address the expected serious environmental and public health impacts through a restoration project is getting shorter. Further delay is simply unacceptable. Almost seven years have passed since the QSA was signed and more than three years have passed since the Natural Resources Agency produced a programmatic plan to restore the Sea. Yet, very little has actually been done to address the declining conditions at the Sea. SB 51 would move California closer to meeting its duty to restore the Salton Sea by providing an entity invested in actually addressing the impending ecological and public health disaster at the Salton Sea.

Failure to sign this bill will only continue the current lack of effort at the Sea and mire restoration work in controversy, risking serious environmental and public health impacts that threaten the local communities in the Coachella and Imperial Valleys as well as state fish and wildlife resources. Suggestions from some that this legislation be rewritten in the future would only further delay action. Local interests enjoy broad representation on the Restoration Council and, importantly, retain the right to stop any proposed restoration project by virtue of their local permitting and land ownership authorities. The Salton Sea can not abide further delay.

Therefore, for the reasons stated above, we urge you to sign SB 51. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Michael Cohen
Pacific Institute



Kim Delfino
Defenders of Wildlife




Dan Taylor
Audubon California

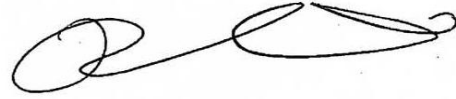


Jim Metropulos
Sierra Club California

¹ Fish and Game Code §2931, et seq.



Bill Gaines
California Outdoor Heritage Alliance



Tina Andolina
Planning and Conservation League

Cc: Senator Ducheny
Assembly Member Salas
Assembly Member Manuel Perez
Secretary Lester Snow