



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement by Erik Ortega, President, Imperial Irrigation District Board of Directors

The goal of the Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan, to reduce the shared risk of reaching critical elevations at Lake Mead by incentivizing rather than penalizing the storage of water there, is as important to the Imperial Irrigation District in 2019 as it was in 2015, when IID became engaged in the DCP process.

But a Lower Basin DCP that attempts to sidestep or work around the unique environmental challenges posed by the Salton Sea, or one that excludes IID because the other parties “can’t wait” for the Sea isn’t really a contingency plan.

It’s an escape hatch.

That’s why Jeff Kightlinger’s informal proposal on behalf of the Metropolitan Water District to backstop all of California’s storage contributions under the DCP, however well-meaning it may be, is unworkable. His sweeping gesture would take IID and the Salton Sea out of the DCP equation by simply erasing them from the DCP itself. It is my hope this was nothing more than a trial balloon.

If, however, it becomes the official position of MWD, if that agency believes that the DCP can’t wait for the Salton Sea.

If it thinks a federal match in support of the state’s Salton Sea Management Plan is too outlandish a request from IID – even though IID isn’t seeking any money for itself.

Then I want the MWD board and the public to know that the IID board took unanimous action today to oppose Mr. Kightlinger’s proposal. At this time, I would ask the general manager to so advise Mr. Kightlinger and MWD by letter of today’s action by the IID board.

Just as it is hydrologically connected to the Colorado River, the Salton Sea is inseparable from the DCP, and any attempt to sweep it aside or pretend it doesn’t exist is as unsustainable as it is cynical. We all need to cross the finish line together, in California and across the two basins, but that won’t happen by taking short cuts, environmental, economic or otherwise.

Finally, I am pleased to report that our general manager, legal counsel and staff have had a series of productive meetings with their counterparts at the Bureau of Reclamation and I am optimistic that we will be able to find a path forward.

For the record, IID remains committed to the DCP process and to voting on the DCP agreements as a package, but the Salton Sea has to be acknowledged for what it is:

An indispensable part of that package, not an invisible one.

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