

**TESTIMONY OF  
JAMES TURNER  
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER  
OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
AND THE  
CALIFORNIA SENATE AGRICULTURAL AND WATER RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**JUNE 14, 2002  
LA QUINTA, CA**

Chairman Calvert, Chairman Costa, and members of the subcommittee and committee. I am Jim Turner, Chairman of the Board of the San Diego County Water Authority. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you on the implementation of the California Colorado River Use Plan and the Quantification Agreement. The matter is of the utmost importance to not only Southern California, but also critical to the overall water management for the entire state.

On December 10, 2001 in Las Vegas, the 4 water agencies were before this subcommittee to provide an update on the progress in implementing the California Plan. In that testimony San Diego, along with the other 3 water agencies, outlined the extensive accomplishments that had been made in moving California closer to being able to formally execute the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) by its deadline of December 31, 2002. Additionally, the urban agencies highlighted additional efforts and investments each was making towards increasing water efficiency and water reliability within our service areas.

We are here today to report that progress continues to be made towards the ultimate implementation of the California Plan. We are also here to tell you that the agencies have encountered an issue that will require both state and federal assistance if we are to resolve it and meet the required deadline. And that issue is the Salton Sea and the potential impacts of the water transfers on it.

No matter where one stands on the merits of restoration efforts for the Salton Sea, it is clear that environmental protection of the sea has been a challenge for the conservation measures involved in the San Diego County Water Authority-Imperial Irrigation District, and the Coachella-Imperial Irrigation District water transfer agreements.

The San Diego-IID agreement, as part of the QSA, is a key component of California's Plan to reduce its reliance on surplus Colorado River water. Should the challenges facing the implementation of the water transfer fail to be successfully addressed, and thus the QSA fail to be executed by the end of the year, instead of a gradual reduction, Southern California faces an immediate cut of 30 percent from its current imported water supply.

Fortunately, we believe this critically important water transfer between the Water Authority and Imperial can still be implemented, and we are working with farmers, community and business leaders in the Imperial Valley on finding an approach that can work for all. Also working with Imperial, the Water Authority, Coachella and the Metropolitan Water District, have been a variety of state and federal officials. The commitment to finding a solution shown by legislators on both the federal and state level

has been vital, and your continued leadership on this issue is greatly appreciated.

The truth is that everyone agrees, including the Water Authority, that Imperial Valley must be fully compensated for any and all impacts of the water transfer on the environment and economy. In fact, the agreement was originally structured to allow Imperial's economy to not only be kept intact, but to be in better shape than before the transfer was implemented.

The Water Authority continues to commit its efforts in working with the federal, state and the other water districts to seek a solution that can be successfully implemented. We believe that, given the challenges around the Salton Sea impacts, we collectively now need to determine a feasible alternative conservation program, reach agreement on the impacts of the program, and allocate the funds to mitigate those impacts.

These impacts directly correlate with the conservation program implemented. Generally, if the program to save water involves on-farm water conservation, money has to be provided to construct the various conservation projects and to offset the environmental impacts of the program. If the program involves the fallowing/land management of some of the farmland to save water, funding will need to compensate the farmers, and go to economic development, job training and other community impacts.

In both cases, funding also would need to cover administration of the program and those related costs. Some in Imperial Valley have floated ideas about a combination of fallowing and on-farm conservation measures as another type of program to implement. In any event, we are positive we can work together to get this done in a way that benefits the Imperial Valley economy and has minimal or no effect on the Salton Sea.

The water transfer is one of many water-supply sources the Water Authority is pursuing as part of a diversified mix of resources. We are continuing efforts to promote water conservation throughout the county. Because of our water-wise habits, San Diegans are using the same amount of water as we did 10 years ago, even though the population has increased 15 percent. Local water supply sources being developed include recycling water, ground water storage and extraction, surface water and seawater desalination.

New advances in desalination technology, cost savings provided by locating desalination facilities next to coastal power plants, and the availability of financial incentives have made the cost of seawater desalination more competitive with other water resources. These developments have prompted the County Water Authority to engage in a serious examination of several options that could make seawater desalination a reality in San Diego County in the near future.

Storage is another area in which the Water Authority is moving forward. The Emergency Storage Project, an \$827 million capital improvement project, will provide more than 90,000 acre-feet of additional storage capacity for the county by 2010.

The County Water Authority is developing all of these programs to diversify its water supply mix in the future. The water transfer with Imperial will not provide additional water to the San Diego region, but rather will replace water lost as a result of California's mandate to live within its Colorado River allocation.

California's Colorado River Water Use Plan is based to a great extent upon the transfer of river water from the Imperial Valley to San Diego, MWD and Coachella. The urban agencies will be paying to implement conservation programs that make the water available for use without economically harming the agricultural community. In the Water Authority-Imperial agreement, the water is made available for

use by the urban area, but the actual water rights stay with the agricultural agency.

Additional assurances for Imperial are provided in the Quantification Settlement Agreement, under which other agencies agree not to challenge the district's water use, which offers the best protection for Imperial's water rights, now and in the future.

The Water Authority feels the same pressure and urgency that have been placed on all the California water agencies that use Colorado River water. The California agencies have done a good job putting together the complex agreements that allow for California to cut back its Colorado River water use by 800,000 acre-feet over a 15-year time period. The Water Authority is resolved to working with the Imperial Valley to create a transfer that benefits all parties – and that ensures the Quantification Settlement Agreement is implemented in time to secure all of California's water future.