



June 25, 2020

The Honorable Jared Blumenfeld
Secretary for Environmental Protection
Chairman, California-Mexico Border Relations Council
California Environmental Protection Agency
1001 I Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Secretary Blumenfeld:


We are writing to ask that you request that the Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board provide the California-Mexico Border Relations Council (Council) with revised New River recommendations to include updated infrastructure and related elements that will provide for the full treatment of polluted New River waters. We understand that the Council intends to meet on July 14, 2020, and we ask that you establish a process and timeline for securing such revised recommendations at that meeting.

Cross border pollution and raw sewage bypasses from Mexicali continue to severely pollute the New River, posing an unacceptable public health threat and undermining water quality in the imperiled Salton Sea. Imperial County is now struggling with the highest rate of COVID-19 in all of California, and exposure to the bacteria, viruses and other pathogens in the New River may increase residents' susceptibility to this new disease.

In 2009, Assembly Bill 1079 (Assemblyman Perez) required the Council to develop a strategic plan to address the significant pollution problems affecting the New River. In 2012, the New River Improvement Project Technical Advisory Committee appointed by the Council recommended the construction of a trash screen, conveyance system, a wastewater/disinfection facility, aeration structures and wetlands. In 2016, these recommendations were amended to delete the wastewater treatment facility, based principally on cost rather than public health and environmental considerations.

In 2017, the city of Calexico, Imperial County and Imperial Irrigation District (IID) agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding providing for their mutual agreement to advance the trash screen, conveyance and pump back system elements of the New River Improvement Project. As a result of this collaborative effort, full funding for that project is now provided for in the state of California's most recent budgets and revisions. This work has our full support.

As this important milestone in the New River Improvement Project is achieved, however, it is critical to ensure that the remaining and significant pollution problems affecting the New River are expeditiously addressed. Since the 2016 revised recommendations, there has been an average

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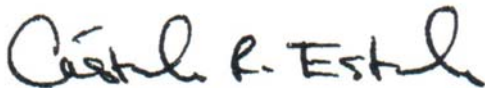
of one bypass of raw sewage per month from Mexicali into the New River ranging in magnitude from 1-13 million gallons per day. This has caused an increase in pathogens in the New River and an increase in harmful nutrients to the Salton Sea.

To address this continuing public health and environmental threat, we ask that you seek the revision of the New River Improvement Project recommendations to provide for infrastructure and other improvements to address these concerns, including recommendations concerning wastewater treatment facility capacity needs, most effective treatment technology, estimated costs/funding sources and facility location sites. We also ask to be included in discussions concerning such a revision.

Given that Congress is actively considering infrastructure stimulus legislation which may provide near-term funding opportunities, we ask that you expedite the provision of these recommendations. Prioritizing investment in infrastructure and other improvements for the New River could both reduce the pollution burden of and provide economic stimulus to heavily COVID-19-impacted communities like those in Imperial County.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Castulo Estrada
Chairman



Alex Cardenas
Vice Chairman