

IID board votes to express support for sea-to-sea project

By DAVID STEFFEN, Staff Writer

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The Imperial Irrigation Board of Directors voted Monday to express support for the concept to pump water from the Sea of Cortez to the Salton Sea.

The board voted 4 to 1 to express support for a memorandum of understanding between the Salton Sea Authority and Utility Solutions, which proposed the sea-to-sea concept.

The MOU to express support does not require a monetary or water commitment from the IID, Director John Pierre Menvielle said.

"It's important IID try to work with the different agencies involved with the Salton Sea Authority and for us to try to work with Imperial County to see if there are some things we can do to help protect the sea," Menvielle said.

IID Director Stella Mendoza voted against expressing support. She said the agencies involved with the project would eventually ask for financial aid from the IID, despite claims to the contrary.

"The sea-to-sea project, in my opinion, is too ambitious," she said, citing the necessary international agreements and public-private partnerships.

She said the project has been discussed for 50 years. Desalination would produce extreme amounts of salt, as well, she said.

"I feel very strongly the sea-to-sea concept of desalinating water and selling water out of the Imperial Valley to the coastal plains or to other agencies will infringe on the district and IID's water rights," Mendoza said.

The sea-to-sea project proposes pumping water from the Sea of Cortez in Baja California, Mexico, into the Salton Sea. Water would replenish Salton Sea levels and could be desalinated and sold to other water districts.

Water sales would fund the project, said IID Director Jim Hanks. Electricity produced from geothermal would power the desalination plants, he said.

"There's going to be tremendous opportunities not just for the water side but the power side," he said.

IID Director Michael Abatti said the sea-to-sea concept would get the most possible benefit from water in the Valley. The same flow of water would irrigate, run hydroelectric plants and replenish the Salton Sea, he said.

"This is an effort to use the water that feeds the nation, and provides power for the Valley, and now we're going to try to use it for the third time — the same water," Abatti said.

>> Staff Writer David Steffen can be reached at 760-337-3452 or dsteffen@ivpressonline.com