

IID vows no more water transfers out of Valley
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By Darren Simon, Staff Writer

In a unanimous vote Tuesday, the Imperial Irrigation District Board of Directors declared its intent not to transfer another drop of water from the Imperial Valley.

On a motion by Director Stella Mendoza, the four IID directors present passed a four-page resolution that outlines the district's policy on further water transfers. The board member not present, Rudy Maldonado, is recovering from heart surgery.

The resolution the directors approved states: "It is important for the IID Board of Directors to communicate in clear and unmistakable terms, and in a public fashion, that the IID and the Imperial Valley community are not interested in entering into new agreements, or other arrangements, that would require the development of additional conserved water either through fallowing or any other means, for use by others outside the Imperial Valley."

The resolution comes as the district has concerns that other water agencies in California and other states along the Colorado River, and the federal government, could look to the Imperial Valley to solve water shortages should a lengthy drought lead to new battles for water supplies.

"I think this sends a message we've paid four or five times," said IID Director Lloyd Allen, speaking of other water transfers

"Don't come looking to us anymore," he added.

Water transfers have been an issue that has divided the Imperial Valley, particularly in the wake of the Quantification Settlement Agreement, a controversial water pact between the seven lower Colorado River basin states in which California's water supply has been reduced.

Key elements of the pact are IID transferring hundreds of thousands of acre-feet of water annually to areas outside the Valley. The largest and most hotly contested transfer agreement has IID sending 200,000 acre-feet per year to the San Diego County Water Authority.

The agreement with SDCWA and the overall QSA has fueled a legal

challenge that has thrown into question IID's right to hold Imperial Valley's water supply in trust.

A group of farmers and landowners called the Imperial Group has filed a lawsuit against IID that challenges the QSA's legality. The lawsuit contends landowners have the right to control the water, not IID.

Another debate in relation to the QSA is that IID has agreed to fallow farmland for 15 years to conserve water. The fallowing program is meant to free water for transfer out of the county and to ensure there is a water supply available to maintain the Salton Sea.

In its resolution, the IID board states: "IID fully intends to move away from fallowing as a means of developing conserved water for temporary transfer to others outside of the Imperial Valley."

The resolution points out the Valley is going to need every single drop of water it has in its entitlement of the Colorado to meet the needs of the Valley's future.

"Additional transfers of conserved water would erode the foundation for future economic development in the Imperial Valley, especially if such transfers are based on the fallowing of production farmland."

Director John Pierre Menvielle said the resolution was an important step for the district to take. Director Andy Horne said: "All we are asking is that the law of the river be followed. It shouldn't be us cutting back before someone else."

The law of the river is the series of federal court actions, compacts and agreements that govern use of the Colorado River. In its resolution, IID states the law of the river has granted the district has a "senior vested water right" while other water agencies have "junior rights."

That means, according to IID and its resolution, IID has a priority over other junior water users that must be protected.#

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