

SALTON SEA: RENEWABLE ENERGY AND RESOURCES
An Informational Hearing of the
Senate Select Committee on California's Energy Independence

June 27, 2013
Upon Adjournment of Senate Session
State Capitol, Room 2040

BACKGROUND

On February 22, 2013, Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, Chaired by then Assemblymember Ben Hueso, held an oversight hearing on the current efforts and opportunities related to the restoration of the Salton Sea. In particular, the Committee discussed the Sea's history, litigation related to state and federal legislation, and administrative actions to address the Sea's challenges.

Today's hearing will build on that initial meeting, to examine the feasibility of geothermal and algal biofuel energy development around the Salton Sea. Further exploration of the renewable energy potential in this area could create a possible funding stream to support the Sea's restoration efforts and significantly contribute to California's economy.

A Sea of Potential Opportunity

Located in the Imperial and Coachella Valley of Southern California, the Salton Sea represents one of the most abundant and underutilized sources of renewable energy in the state, including the most prolific geothermal capacity in the world. Geothermal power plants supply base load power, electricity that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The high reliability of geothermal technology compares favorably to conventional power plants.

In addition to geothermal energy, the Salton Sea has shown incredible potential as a source of biofuels. For decades, the Sea has served as a drain for over 650,000 acres of nutrient-rich runoff from the area's agricultural industry. These nutrient-rich waters lead to excessive growth of algae and other microscopic plants, which, along with evaporation, contribute over time to eutrophication and deteriorated water and air quality. Paradoxically, they are also a resource that may represent one of the key solutions to restoration of the Sea and economic recovery for the region.

In assessing existing resources and agencies associated with the Salton Sea, the Committee may wish to consider appropriate legislative and regulatory decisions that could 1) facilitate renewable energy development; 2) avoid potential resource conflicts; and 3) mitigate environmental impacts related to geothermal and algal biofuel testing and development.

Successful resolution of the complex environmental and social challenges posed by the Salton Sea will require a collaborative effort on the part of multiple agencies, interested groups and local citizens. The challenges are significant, but the opportunities are significant as well. Bringing stakeholders together to assess the viability and feasibility of geothermal and algal biofuel energy development around the Salton Sea is an important step toward establishing creative solutions to address the current challenges affecting the Sea.