

June 14, 2002

Admiral Watkins,

I received and herein respond to your letter of May 30 requesting comments on border watershed and coastal water quality. It was a pleasure to testify before your commission in Long Beach this spring.

While Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment (TEIA) has moved forward in many locations (notably in the European Union) it has stalled on the U.S.-Mexico border. It is aggravatingly so for terrestrial sources for near-shore oceanic pollution. It is a complex but necessary first step to minimizing, mitigating, and monitoring cumulative impacts.

Historically, most pollution in wastewater streams from Mexico was nutrient loading as well as human and other coliforms. These were more easily addressed by most traditional treatment technologies. However as more industrialization occurs in the border region, more effluents contain heavy metal and toxic components not previously noted. Industrial pre-treated is in its infancy in Mexico so we can expect these contaminants to increasingly enter the riparian, estuarine, and oceanic systems affecting seafood, sediments and the entire water column.

We have expended extensive effort in several areas to help Mexico clean its waste flows. First we are using optimality theory to design cost-effective infrastructure improvements for the periphery of the fast growing urban areas of coastal Baja California. Secondly, also in Baja, we are evaluating technology to treat fish processing plants - one of the most polluting point sources on the Pacific coast. Third, we are developing and disseminating multi-media atlases of watersheds to assist in decision-making relative to use of those waterscapes.

Finally, we encourage the work of national and binational watershed councils to address non-point pollution. Our own experience points out their value but also the stalled nature of such binational work.

In all these issues a clear federal role to facilitate, support, even allow the dialogue exists. Too much besides seafood and tourism is at stake!

Regards,

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