

Israel's Economic and 4 Territorial Waters

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Background

One of the most important issues for Israel in the next decade is how to develop the Mediterranean and its resources while fulfilling international obligations to protect the marine environment and ecosystem. In the last decade Israel discovered, within its economic waters, enough gas and oil to become energy independent, and potentially a fuel exporter, for the first time in its history – a development that is nothing less than game changing. In addition, technological advances and government investment in desalination means Israel may also be able to become a water exporter to its arid neighbors as well as fulfill all its domestic water needs. In fact, by the end of 2013 desalinated water will provide 85% of Israel's domestic freshwater consumption.^[6]

The Mediterranean is also Israel's most important import/export route with 98% of goods arriving or leaving by sea^[2]. Cargo vessels are getting larger which means new ports need to be built or Israel will be cut off as a port on the main Europe-Asia trading route, resulting in more expensive imports and exports. In addition, demand for new marinas and recreational facilities along the coast increase pressure on the coastline. These developments have the potential to damage the sea bed and Mediterranean ecosystem.

As land prices increase developers will increasingly look to the sea as an alternative. Several countries including the Netherlands, Japan and Dubai have built artificial islands and archipelagos to increase the size of their land resources. With Israel's small size there is a good chance that Israel's developers will follow suit as the cost of reclaiming land from the sea becomes economically feasible. The sites of these artificial islands need to be chosen carefully to limit the damage to the environment.

All these factors need to be taken account by both the Israeli government and environmental groups when determining policy for the Mediterranean. SPNI is working to develop a strategy that promotes development while preserving the Mediterranean's

ecosystem. SPNI works with decision and policy makers to ensure that physical damage to the Mediterranean and the ecological system is limited to prevent a full ecological breakdown while economic and infrastructure development takes place.

Aims and Objectives

- > To promote and implement sustainable policies in the Mediterranean Sea with a focus on protecting biodiversity.
- > To advance environmental considerations within governmental decision making to ensure development decisions take environmental and economic costs into account.
- > To conduct new research and studies of the Mediterranean to offer better policy tools and suggest proper regulations to protect the environment and biodiversity.
- > To raise awareness of the importance of a comprehensive and integrated plan to develop Israel's economic and territorial waters.
- > To promote new legislation concerning the governing and regulation of Israel's economic waters, specifically environmental regulation.
- > To create a national budget for emergency operations which will be used in the event of a major oil spill or a similar catastrophe.

Key Achievements in 2012

- > The 5th Annual Jerusalem Conference: SPNI's annual Jerusalem Conference "Facing the Sea – how to preserve the sea so it can protect us" was devoted to the topic of the management of Israel's marine sources. The conference received a great deal of exposure and over 600 people attended including decision makers from government agencies and ministries including the Ministry for Environmental Protection, Energy, Interior, Agriculture and the Parks and Nature Authority. This year's conference included several prominent international speakers and experts who shared their expertise and ideas on how Israel should manage its economic waters.
- > Workshop on Mediterranean management: Following the conference, we chaired invitation only workshops with decision makers from the aforementioned government



ministries, government agencies and state owned institutions that have authority or interest in developing the Mediterranean Sea along with international experts.

- > Promoting sustainable fishing: Israel's marine fishing supplies only 2% of Israel's consumption and causes disproportionate damage to the environment. SPNI has raised awareness of the issue and we are beginning to research different possibilities for how to effectively regulate Israel's deep sea, coastal and sports fishing to minimize environmental damage, especially from deep sea trawling, and protect fish stocks and marine wildlife.
- > Maritime Disaster Contingency Plan: Before the Maritime Disaster Contingency Plan was approved Israel had no emergency mechanism to deal with a catastrophic oil spill on the scale of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico spill. Due to Israel's size an oil spill could potentially disrupt the entire country and decimate Israel's tourist industry. Using our political influence to raise this issue at planning committees dealing with offshore drilling and utilizing our ability to raise the issue in the media and with the public, we ensured that the Ministry

for Environmental Protection received the necessary funds to be able to effectively react to an oil spill or other maritime catastrophe.

Continuing Activities for 2013

- > Developing our sustainable fishing project and implementing recommendations.
- > Formulation of policy recommendations for marine environmental regulation: SPNI is planning a new comparative study comparing how other countries have developed effective, comprehensive, integrated and transparent policy platforms which allows for economic development of their marine resources while fulfilling their international obligations.
- > Support changes to regulations and new guidelines to properly regulate oil and gas drilling in Israel's economic waters.