

5 Energy

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Background

Until recently Israel's energy production was largely based on coal-fueled power stations, which have a high environmental impact mainly through atmospheric emissions contributing to air pollution and global warming. With the recent discoveries of natural gas in Israel's economic waters there is now an opportunity to revolutionize Israel's energy industry by replacing coal with natural gas while fulfilling Israel's international commitments to increase the amount of renewable energy used. New energy policy and infrastructure development has to be crafted and regulated properly to protect Israel's nature and unique biodiversity.

The use of natural gas for energy production as an alternative to coal will reduce the amount of greenhouse gases that Israel

produces. Natural gas produces approximately 45% less carbon dioxide emissions than burning coal^[7] and natural gas power plants take up less space than the alternatives; a central consideration is taking into account Israel's small size and need to protect open spaces. In addition natural gas power plants do not need to be built along the coast.

Technological innovations have begun to make renewable energy an affordable and efficient alternative to fossil fuels for energy production. In January 2009 the Israeli government set a target that by 2020 10% of all electricity will be generated from renewable methods. Due to Israel's climate and landscape the most obvious methods to achieve this is through wind and solar energy. Power plants for renewable energy can be located in the North and South, creating jobs and wealth in Israel's economic periphery and diversifying energy production from a strategic perspective. However, there are drawbacks to renewable energy. Firstly, renewable energy is highly inefficient, requiring a huge amount of land which is problematic for a country as small as



Wind turbines

Israel. In addition, wind turbines pose a major hazard to bats and migrating birds.

SPNI advocates the use of natural gas as the foundation of Israel's national policy from the environmental perspective while also encouraging Israel to fulfill its OECD obligation of combatting global warming by reducing its emissions through the increased use of renewable energy.

Aims and Objectives

- > To support the promotion of an energy economy based largely on natural gas as the most environmentally appropriate path for Israel.
- > To promote and implement sustainable policies in the energy sector that takes into account the need to protect nature and biodiversity.
- > To ensure environmental considerations are a factor in decision and policy making especially in regards to land use, open spaces and biodiversity protection.
- > To integrate spatial considerations, the need to protect open spaces and the impact on flying animals when determining the use and placement of solar power plants and wind turbines.
- > To change oil and gas drilling regulations (mainly within the 1952 Petroleum Law) to reduce environmental risks and ensure Israel is legislatively prepared to effectively manage offshore drilling.
- > To promote a Maritime Disaster Contingency Plan.

Key Achievements in 2012

- > Changes to the 1952 Petroleum Law: SPNI conducted research and prepared reports on various topics for the Department of Energy including: implementing guidelines for offshore oil and gas exploration, onshore production of these resources, and introducing an environmental health and safety code which was previously authorized by section 47 of the amendment to the 1952 Petroleum Law. As a result of our work the Petroleum Council, a closed group of vested interests, now includes two representatives from environmental organizations, one being Ruth Schwartz, SPNI's specialist on energy.
- > Maritime Disaster Contingency Plan: Before the Maritime Disaster Contingency Plan was approved Israel had no emergency mechanism to deal with a catastrophe on the scale of 2010 Gulf of Mexico spill. Due to Israel's small size an oil spill would have the potential to destroy Israel's tourist industry. Using our ability to influence the political and public discourse and by raising this issue at planning committees concerned with offshore drilling we ensured that the Ministry for Environmental Protection received the financial ability to be able to instantly react to an oil spill or other maritime catastrophe.
- > Solar power: SPNI advocates the prioritization of placing solar panels on rooftops rather than building solar power plants. We submitted a report, in cooperation with the Israel Energy Forum, to the inter-ministerial committee dealing with integrating renewable energy into the mix, with a specific emphasis on the dangers to Israel's open spaces of building solar power plants.
- > Protecting birds and bats: Wind turbines are hazards to birds and bats. We wrote white papers on the problem and presented this information at the highest levels including to the inter-ministerial team that developed the plan for wind turbines and at professional conferences.
- > National development plans: At the planning level we helped develop Israel's national development plans on energy policy including the use of natural gas, cooking gas, and wind energy.
- > Educating decision makers: We held roundtable discussions with the Israel Electricity Company exchanging ideas and opinions and promoting cooperative learning about natural gas and renewal energy.
- > Influencing public opinion: We promoted natural gas as the basis for Israel's energy economy by speaking at conferences, publishing articles in the media including on Ynet.co.il (Israel's most popular news website) and in the Haaretz daily newspaper, and attending public forums on this topic. We also promoted an energy economy based on natural gas via activities in the planning arena and by attending meetings to promote public participation in the Tama 37H National Development Plan.



Continuing Activities for 2013

- > Continuing to promote of natural gas for domestic energy use: Continued support of the TAMA 37H National Development Plan with an emphasis on the location of new power plants and refineries and energy infrastructure and also conducting research on the issue of gas export to determine the optimal environmental stance on this issue.
- > Promoting environmental surveys of offshore drilling sites: Raising awareness among decision makers of the need to conduct a comprehensive and strategic examination of the environmental impact of offshore oil and gas drilling at various locations before new drilling franchises are issued. For example: the Gabriella drill site off the coast of Herzeliya.
- > Protect open spaces and ecological corridors: Engaging decision makers and the public about the importance of preserving open spaces and ecological corridors with regards to the placement of new power plants.
- > Continued monitoring of environmental regulatory changes: Ensuring that proposed changes to the Petroleum Law including the Environmental Health and Safety Code are implemented.
- > Developing Comprehensive marine planning process: Supporting the development of a comprehensive and integrative marine planning process which will examine the management of different activities in the Mediterranean, including offshore drilling, from a holistic and comprehensive perspective in order to reduce the environmental impact on ecosystems and make sure Israel's marine resources are used efficiently.
- > Promoting environmental and biodiversity considerations within the decision making process in planning institutions.