

Government Relations and Lobbying Activity of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel

2025-2026

Throughout 2025–2026, as throughout the entire term of the 25th Knesset, we worked continuously to block measures that would harm the environment and nature, within a Knesset and government that consistently acted contrary to sound environmental policy. Nevertheless, despite the limited governmental, parliamentary and public attention devoted to protecting the environment and nature, despite the polarized political system, and despite the weakening status of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the 25th Knesset also saw significant achievements in nature protection.

A considerable number of issues on which we had worked over the past four years advanced, and some even reached a successful conclusion, in 2025–2026.

Blocking Environmental Threats in the 2026 Arrangements Law

From the earliest drafts of the 2026 Arrangements Law, it was clear that it contained numerous serious and destructive environmental threats. We identified some 30 major concerns, including the privatization of the Ministry of Environmental Protection's environmental advisory role, the irresponsible promotion of data centers, problematic reforms in the waste sector, and more.

Through professional work with the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Finance Budget Department, regional and local government, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, and other bodies, **we succeeded in removing or substantially reducing most of these measures.**

Eventually, the Arrangements Law reached the Knesset with five major issues remaining:

1. Severe harm to nature reserves and national parks
2. Harm to Israel's beaches and the unchecked opening of the coastal environment to development
3. Damage to the Clean Air Law and weakened oversight of air polluters
4. Reduced protection for mature trees and a weakening of the Forest Officer
5. Extension of the VATMAL Law, which enables aggressive development through a fast-track planning process.

It took a great deal of intensive work vis-à-vis the government, with the assistance of Knesset members, coalitions of environmental organizations, and other civil-society bodies, but we finally succeeded in removing all five provisions from the expedited legislative process. In practice, four were stopped entirely.

The sole exception was VATMAL—the National Committee for the Planning and Development of Preferred Housing Complexes, a fast-track planning body created to accelerate large-scale housing development, often at the expense of full planning and environmental scrutiny. Unfortunately, the legislation authorizing its continued operation was extended, but only through a limited one-year temporary order.

20 Years in the Making: The Passage of the Construction Waste Law

The most important environmental law passed by the 25th Knesset, and one of the greatest environmental achievements of recent years, is the **Construction Waste Law**. It was approved at the very last moment, when its chances of passage had become very slim.

Israel's construction-waste crisis represents a severe and persistent market failure, in which more than one million tons of waste are illegally dumped in open areas every year. This sad state of affairs, in which waste is handled as though Israel were a developing country, with the involvement of criminal elements and the use of forged permits, causes enormous environmental and economic damage.

Illegal dumping leads to severe contamination of soil and water sources, air pollution from fires, and serious damage to ecosystems, agricultural land and, of course, the landscape. It also causes economic harm through the loss of landfill levies and accumulated cleanup costs estimated at billions of shekels.

This ongoing failure meant that “it paid to pollute”: the likelihood that an offender illegally dumping construction waste would be caught and punished was negligible, as were the penalties prescribed by law.

To address a phenomenon that had become an epidemic and a national hazard, the Construction Waste Law was advanced. It is considered the most urgent reform in Israel's waste sector and will fundamentally alter the balance of power. Yet attempts to pass the law began more than 20 years ago.

The dramatic significance of the legislation lies in the transition from attempts at enforcement after the fact to close supervision and oversight beginning at the stage when the waste is generated, continuing through its transportation by truck, and ending with its receipt at designated facilities.

SPNI has led efforts to advance this law for many years, investing considerable professional resources. The legislation came close to failing in the 25th Knesset as well. However, enormous and assertive efforts were invested both in substantially improving the legislation—particularly on the crucial issue of bringing the treatment of “surplus soil” within its scope—and in exerting political pressure through every available means, with all relevant political actors, up to the very last moment. **The law was ultimately approved through rare cooperation between the coalition and the opposition.**

Protecting the Sea

Tracking Trawlers and Reducing Their Fishing Areas

One of SPNI's flagship campaigns in the field of marine protection is the campaign against fishing by trawlers, which cause enormous ecological damage to the marine environment in Israel and throughout the world.

Trawling involves dragging fishing nets along the seabed and indiscriminately sweeping up everything caught in the nets. Because it is non-selective, this method is extremely destructive to marine ecosystems, fish populations and protected species, as well as to Israel's infrastructure, the fishing economy and the majority of Israel's fishers.

SPNI has worked for many years to ban trawling. It achieved significant success with the approval of the 2016 Fishing Regulations, which substantially reduced the extent of trawling.

Nevertheless, trawling continues. With the assistance of various Knesset members and through our work vis-à-vis the government, we are advancing legislation and parliamentary discussions aimed at prohibiting this destructive fishing method, while providing financial compensation to the fishers who still use it.

Approximately one year ago, the chair of the Knesset Economic Affairs Committee declared that he would use the committee's authority to support the removal of all remaining trawlers. This commitment was not fulfilled because of the firm opposition of the Fisheries Department in the Ministry of Agriculture.

However, after nine years, fishing regulations were finally approved requiring trawlers to be tracked and prohibiting them from sailing close to gas pipelines. These regulations effectively adopted a bill written by SPNI and advanced by MK Mickey Levy of Yesh Atid.

The new regulations will significantly improve oversight of trawler activity, particularly in protected and sensitive areas and during breeding seasons, and represent another significant step in protecting the sea. They were approved following extensive efforts and considerable political work, with the assistance of Knesset members from both the coalition and the opposition.

Protecting Israel's Economic Waters

We met with representatives of the Ministry of Justice regarding the proposed **Maritime Zones Law**, which seeks to regulate permitted and prohibited activity within Israel's economic waters. The bill was written by SPNI and is being advanced by MK Alon Schuster of Blue and White.

The representatives of the Ministry of Justice expressed support for the initiative and for advancing the legislation. The bill was also brought before the Ministerial Committee for Legislation, which decided that a further discussion should be held.

MK Alon Schuster is leading continued coordination with government ministries in order to advance the initiative as a government bill.

Protecting Israel's Rivers and Streams

For years, an absurd loophole in Israeli law made it easier to pollute rivers and streams than the sea. Those discharging pollutants into the sea were required to obtain a permit and pay a levy, in accordance with the “polluter pays” principle. No equivalent requirement was being applied to those polluting Israel’s rivers and streams.

The situation could have deteriorated even further under the 2023 Arrangements Law, which included a proposal to weaken oversight of permits for discharging pollutants into rivers, streams and the sea. Through lobbying in the Knesset Interior and Environmental Protection Committee and work with the relevant professional bodies, we succeeded in splitting the proposal off from the Arrangements Law, preserving the existing oversight.

Over the following three years, we worked to close the loophole. We drafted legislation that would strengthen oversight of polluters and require anyone discharging pollutants into rivers and streams to obtain a permit and pay a levy, just as those polluting the sea are required to do.

In late 2025, we succeeded in initiating an in-depth discussion in the Knesset Interior and Environmental Protection Committee, where we exposed both the systemic failure to protect Israel’s rivers and streams and the legal loophole that had enabled it.

The committee’s legal adviser at the time, Attorney Rosner, was persuaded by our arguments and stated for the official record that the Ministry of Environmental Protection had been interpreting the law incorrectly and failing to perform its duty by not requiring the permit and levy called for in our proposed legislation.

The committee discussion and resulting legal opinion brought about a concrete change: **polluters are now required to obtain a discharge permit and pay a levy.** Implementation is still not working smoothly and requires continued monitoring, but this is a significant step and a major achievement.

Protecting the Environmental Voice in Planning Decisions

SPNI represents Israel’s environmental organizations on national and district planning committees, giving environmental concerns a formal voice in the bodies that shape the country’s development. **This statutory role, established under the Planning and Building Law, is a crucial part of SPNI’s ability to influence planning policy and protect open spaces and ecosystems from harmful development.**

During the recent Knesset, obstacles were placed in the way of several appointments and attempts were made to prevent them. However, through lengthy and intensive political and legal work, we succeeded in appointing SPNI representatives to the Central and Haifa District Planning Committees, as well as observers to the Israel Land Authority Council, enabling them to faithfully carry out their work and public mission.

Recognizing that political actors may attempt to thwart the work of environmental representatives through the technical appointments process, we drafted a bill intended to

restrict this possibility and protect these professional appointments. The bill is being advanced by MK Ya'akov Asher, former chair of the Knesset Interior and Environmental Protection Committee.

Protecting Animals and Wildlife

A Breakthrough in the Fight Against Illegal Wildlife Trafficking

In June 2026, the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee approved the 2026 Prohibition on Money Laundering Order—a breakthrough in the fight against environmental crime.

The order moves the response to the illegal trade in animals, wildlife and protected natural assets from the realm of ordinary environmental enforcement into that of organized crime and serious economic crime. This has major implications for both the penalties available under the law and the resources that can be devoted to combating the trade.

It gives law-enforcement and judicial authorities significant new powers, including the seizure and confiscation of assets, bank accounts and real estate purchased with the proceeds of illegal trafficking, as well as the ability to investigate the financial channels used by smuggling networks.

The order was approved as a two-year temporary measure, during which a comprehensive and permanent legislative amendment is intended to be completed.

SPNI played a leading role in the coalition working to prevent wildlife trafficking and in advancing the order, together with the other partner organizations, through both lobbying and legal work.

Protecting Endangered Birds from Hunting

Since 2020, SPNI has worked to secure temporary bans on the hunting of **Common Quail** and **European Turtle Dove**—two migratory bird species whose numbers in Israel have declined sharply, largely as a result of hunting.

Despite strong opposition from politically influential hunting organizations, we succeeded in securing a further extension of the temporary order in August 2025. We are now working to have it extended again.

Our ultimate goal is to remove both species, which are endangered, from the list of birds that may legally be hunted in Israel. We are also seeking to prohibit the hunting of the Common Wood Pigeon.

Energy and the Environment

SPNI works to advance renewable energy and, at the same time, protect Israel's open spaces and ecosystems from harmful development. In a small and densely populated country, energy needs often come at the expense of nature.

This became particularly evident during the 25th Knesset, with the advancement of countless plans for power plants, photovoltaic and agrivoltaic installations on open and agricultural land, and even major “energy guzzlers” such as data centers.

Stopping the Fast-Track Promotion of Data Centers

The government advanced legislation that would classify data centers as national infrastructure. Our principal environmental concern was their enormous consumption of electricity and land.

Placing data centers on a fast-track national infrastructure planning route would have triggered the construction of extensive new electricity infrastructure, including numerous new power plants, to meet their immense energy demands.

This accelerated development would have harmed ecological connectivity, habitats, the electricity sector and Israeli consumers.

SPNI led the campaign against the government bodies that brought the legislation before the Knesset. We succeeded in recruiting and convincing most of the key actors that the legislation served no useful purpose and had enormous potential to cause harm. Ultimately, with the assistance of members of the Knesset environmental lobby, we defeated the legislation through parliamentary means.

Limiting the Damage from Ground-Mounted Solar Development

A bill was introduced requiring the Israel Land Authority to allocate land in peripheral areas for ground-mounted solar installations.

Our central concern was that the bill offered an “easy solution” at the expense of Israel’s limited and diminishing land resources. It would have enabled the seizure and conversion of open spaces, damaging habitats, ecological corridors, landscapes and ecosystems.

The bill also risked driving the construction of transmission infrastructure and power lines far from the principal areas of demand in central Israel, while diverting resources away from solar development in built-up areas and dual-use sites such as rooftops, parking lots and sports grounds.

The bill was approved. However, we succeeded in substantially limiting the damage: the amount of land designated for allocation was significantly reduced, and allocation by the Israel Land Authority was made conditional on the project complying with the statutory plan governing the site and receiving the approvals required under the Electricity Sector Law. This prevents land from being allocated without proper planning and environmental oversight.

A further mechanism was introduced requiring the local authority, at the end of the project period, to clear the site and return the land to the Israel Land Authority. This is intended to prevent the irreversible conversion of open land into permanent development.

Supporting Communities Against Power Plants in Sensitive Areas

We are assisting residents in opposing the construction of power plants in sensitive areas in the Sha’ar Hagai and Jerusalem region — a successful campaign that resulted in the proposal being removed from the agenda — and in the Hefer Valley.

Defending Environmental Impact Assessments

In July 2026, the Planning Administration attempted a last-minute power grab to strip the Ministry of Environmental Protection of its authority as the Planning Administration's environmental adviser. It sought to replace in-depth environmental impact assessments with generic, "thin" and superficial guidelines written by the Planning Administration itself.

In other words, the body responsible for promoting development and advancing plans would also be responsible for applying the brakes.

Environmental impact assessments are among Israel's most important planning and environmental tools. The danger was that this move would reduce environmental and public-health oversight to a technical "rubber stamp," leading to irreversible damage to natural areas and open spaces and serious harm to public health.

Within a very short period, **SPNI organized and led a massive public and media campaign.** It brought together dozens of environmental and health organizations, grassroots activists, a public demonstration, and more than 1,400 signatories.

The pressure reached its peak at a meeting of the National Planning and Building Council and succeeded in stopping the power grab. The Council voted unanimously to halt the move and instructed the Planning Administration and the Ministry of Environmental Protection to work together on an agreed compromise.

Saving Ein Fit

Ein Fit is a wild valley in the northern Golan Heights—an ecological paradise of year-round springs, historic orchards and an exceptional concentration of wildlife. Thousands of animals, including gazelles, wolves and martens, move through the valley along an open ecological corridor.

This magnificent area faced a genuine threat of destruction when the IDF advanced plans to build a training facility, infrastructure and roads for heavy vehicles at the site.

The plan was approved behind closed doors by the Committee for Defense Facilities, without transparency, public participation or any examination of environmental alternatives. It threatened to devastate the ecosystem through around-the-clock noise, polluting traffic and light pollution that would drive away the wildlife and destroy its habitat.

The campaign appeared lost. But a united front of Golan residents, environmental activists and hikers from across the country succeeded in turning it around. Some 34,000 people signed the petition.

SPNI provided the activists with professional support and carried out intensive lobbying vis-à-vis MK Yitzhak Kreuzer, a Golan resident and chair of the Knesset Interior and Environmental Protection Committee. We took him on a tour of the site, initiated the committee discussion and prepared him for it—from the professional materials and guiding questions to the list of participants.

The massive public and parliamentary pressure left the IDF no choice but to enter into an open dialogue and reconsider whether the project was truly necessary at such a sensitive site. To our great relief, the IDF Chief of Staff ultimately announced that the plan would be abandoned.

Saving the Dead Sea

The current Dead Sea Works concession is due to expire within a few years, in 2030. This is a historic opportunity that will not return: an opportunity to reshape the region and halt the State of Israel's continuing failure to protect the dying Dead Sea.

Yet the Ministry of Finance is seeking to establish exclusive control over the management of the Dead Sea and focus solely on revenues to the state treasury, with no environmental consideration whatsoever.

SPNI, together with other organizations, established an active and effective environmental coalition to oppose the draft Concession Law published for public comment. The draft ignores the recommendations of the State Comptroller, includes no environmental vision or restoration plan, and disregards the "polluter pays" principle.

As part of this effort, we initiated numerous discussions in Knesset committees, exposing the authorities' continuing failure. Our close watch and consistent public oversight changed the government's position from one discussion to the next. In the latest hearing, a representative of the Accountant General stated that the Concession Law would include an environmental chapter—directly contradicting the position expressed in earlier discussions.

Our goal is to continue this work with the next government and ensure that the new law establishes a dedicated, coordinating authority to manage the region, rather than concentrating power in the Ministry of Finance. The law should also provide for a dedicated ecological restoration fund and the restoration of water flow through the Lower Jordan River, halting the decline in the Dead Sea's water level.

Keeping Our Open Spaces Open

SPNI places particular emphasis on protecting open spaces, ecosystems and wildlife.

As part of this work, we took extensive action regarding illegal construction in Modi'in's Gazelle Valley and the authorities' failure to address it.

We appeared and spoke at discussions of the Knesset Interior and Environmental Protection Committee and the State Control Committee. We also met with the chairs of both committees, MK Yitzhak Kreuzer and MK Alon Schuster, who sent letters to the relevant authorities.

The chair of the State Control Committee also joined us for a tour in preparation for the discussion held by his committee. We also met on the matter with MK Sharon Nir of Yisrael Beiteinu.

Holding EAPC Accountable

We continue to monitor attempts by the polluting Europe Asia Pipeline Company to increase the scale of its operations, which endanger the Gulf of Eilat.

As part of this work, we are engaging with the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee to reduce the secrecy protections granted to the company and increase the number of authorized state representatives permitted to oversee its activities.

In addition, we are closely following the work of the Ministry of Environmental Protection, which is responsible for issuing approvals for the company's various activities.