



Friends of the Earth *Middle East*



June, 2010
Amman, Jerusalem, Ramallah

Comments of EcoPeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East to World Bank Public Hearing.

Red Sea – Dead Sea Water Conveyance Project

Introduction:

1. EcoPeace/Friends of the Earth Middle East is a unique, grassroots, not-for-profit organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists with the primary objective of promoting cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. In so doing, we seek to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in our region.
2. In recent years we, along with local communities, have dedicated a great deal of our time and resources to promoting a cooperative approach to water issues, particularly in the Dead Sea Basin and the Jordan River Valley.
3. Though we have led the campaign to protect the Dead Sea from further degradation, we are deeply concerned about the manner in which the World Bank and beneficiary governments are seeking to achieve this objective.
4. A study to investigate how to rehabilitate the Dead Sea, that would include a water conveyance stretching from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea (RDC) together with other alternatives, all in a comprehensive and independent fashion, would have the support of FoEME. As detailed below the World Bank has failed to lead such a study.
5. Often cited 'facts' that the Dead Sea will disappear by 2050, if nothing is done, is completely unfounded. Best science tells us that the Dead Sea will never dry up completely due to a combination of water inflow from the floor of the 350 meter deep lake and decreasing evaporation rates due to increased salinity.

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Overview:

The World Bank 'Study Program' is being undertaken in a very unusual manner involving a set of disconnected consultants producing reports in an order that is contrary to common sense and in a manner that questions the integrity of the study process.

Of concern is:

- The independent nature of the study program with the Bank having hired key consultants that were recommended by or closely associated with the beneficiary governments rather than through the general practice of international tender.
- The short time constraints placed on key aspects of the study program (alternatives, Red Sea and Dead Sea modeling) that question the seriousness of the study program.
- That these public hearings are being held at a time when there is next to no new information being provided. Interim reports, from which the public would learn a great deal and perhaps ask many more difficult questions, are due only a month from now in July 2010. The next set of public hearings based on these reports will only be held in 2011 as the study program starts to wind down.

Details of the Proposed Scheme:

Landscape Impacts:

The scheme involves great disturbance of landscape.

The pipeline option would lay 3 to 4 pipes of 3.4 meter diameter each scaring the landscape with a 60 meter width mound (and probably fencing) for the full 170 km journey from the Gulf of Aqaba to the desalination plant.

The higher tunnel option will create two long stretches of open canal – 29 and 28 km in length respectively, likely attracting further induced impacts such as hotel and recreational development in the middle of the unique desert landscape. This is contrary to sustainable development principles that would concentrate any new developments in the existing tourism zones around the Dead Sea and in Aqaba and Eilat.

Ground Water Impacts:

The scheme threatens to contaminate groundwater in the Araba/Arava Valley due to sea water intrusion, from pipeline or tunnel. No modeling is being undertaken to seriously address this concern.

Energy Impacts:

The scheme will not produce net renewable energy but will be an energy burden on the beneficiaries, and in particular Jordan, because of the very extensive sea water and fresh water pumping inherent in the scheme.

Page 155 of the Initial Assessment Report details that, "Energy demand from the scheme may be of the order 600 to 900 MW and will therefore constitute a significant additional demand for energyThis will entail additional generation capacity – ie additional power stations." (Total capacity in Jordan is only 2,300MW)

This amount of energy required to be produced is equal to two new fossil fuel power stations – most likely to be built along the Aqaba coast line, with associated landscape, pollution and climate change impacts.

Sustainable Water Economies:

Focusing on Jordan's water economy the report states on page 154 – 'One possible negative impact of the water availability (from the scheme) is the reduction of the supply constraint to the agricultural sector in Jordan, which may lead to increased inefficiencies in agriculture, where the returns on agriculture are less than the cost of the water to the sector.'

Considering that the agricultural sector in Jordan consumes over 65% of water resources in the country it would make better sense to focus on demand management. See alternatives section below.

Job Creation:

Considering the billions of dollars invested the scheme will create only 100 to 150 permanent jobs.

Environmental and Social Impacts:

Key points of concern here relate to the way in which the additional studies modeling the impact of the scheme on Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba were commissioned and the very limited time period (18 months all up) given to undertake the work. The limited time frame brings into question the reliability of results. FoEME has asked that the Independent Panel of Experts comment on this issue.

Study of Alternatives:

FoEME recently released two reports that identify how the partial restoration of the Jordan River would better serve the objectives laid out by the World Bank. Please see:

<http://www.foeme.org/publications.php?ind=21>

In the report, “An environmental flows report on the rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River,” FoEME concludes that under all circumstances 400-600 million cubic meters (mcm) of water are needed to rehabilitate the Lower Jordan River, an amount of water that would considerably assist in stabilizing water levels at the Dead Sea.

The second study, “An economic analysis of policy options for water conservation in Jordan, Israel and Palestine,” identified that over 1.2 billion cubic meters of water (more water than to be produced by the scheme) could be conserved if more sustainable water practices were initiated in the region, most of it at prices less than the marginal cost of water. Israel should be called on to contribute initially 220 mcm of water annually to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, with the additional water savings used to more fairly share water resources with Palestinians. Jordan is initially called on to contribute 90 mcm to the Jordan and Dead Sea with additional water savings still available to improve domestic water demand needs.

Were the equivalent investment of the billions of dollars proposed for the scheme, invested in the Jordan Valley, not only could both the Jordan River be partially rehabilitated and Dead Sea levels rise, but more fresh water would be made available for domestic needs in Jordan and Palestine, and thousands of new job opportunities and alternative livelihood opportunities be created (i.e. tourism) for the more than 500,000 residents of the Jordan Valley – Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli.

The alternatives study component was forced upon the World Bank by the NGO community but appears to be carried out in principle only. Three experts have been tasked with what appears to be the impossible, reviewing some 13 alternative options and the various combinations of these options in a time period that gives them little more than 6 months.

These comments are given in addition to those given by FoEME in earlier public hearings and in particular to the FoEME statement made at the Euro-Mediterranean Water Ministerial held in Amman, Jordan in December 2008. See: <http://www.foeme.org/publications.php?ind=28>

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For more information please visit our website at: www.foeme.org