

**Comments of Friends of the Earth Middle East  
to the World Bank Terms of Reference for the Red Sea – Dead Sea Water  
Conveyance Project;  
Feasibility Study and Environmental and Social assessment.**

**Comments to May 26, 2003 Confidential Draft.**

**A. General Conceptual Comments to ToR:**

There are several significant issues to the World Bank ToR that make this document less useful than what would generally be expected from a draft ToR. These issues relate to the lack of clarity as to who are the parties, whether they share a common vision at all and what that common vision might be. The ToR identifies validation of shared vision and scope of project as a first step to be undertaken by the consultant to be hired. Part of this validation process is needed now to identify the common interests of the parties' in order to redefine the project. For Israel a government decision as to the future of the Dead Sea has been taken at Cabinet level and is not mentioned, let alone considered in the draft ToR. For the Palestinian Authority there is no discussion of what are their interests in the project and how these might be shared with other parties. The current draft of the ToR can go no further until these issues are clarified.

**The Parties.**

There is no clear definition of who the parties are as first mentioned in Part A, section 1.2 of the ToR. It is unclear whether the parties are the five riparians to the Jordan River Basin; Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) as listed in section 1.1. Are they the Government Ministers of Jordan and Israel who presented at the WSSD in Johannesburg and World Water Forum in Kyoto as mentioned in section 1.2? Do the parties include Egypt and Saudi Arabia as riparians of the Gulf of Aqaba as mentioned in section 1.2? Are the parties the lower Jordan riparians only; Jordan, Israel and the PNA as listed in section 1.4?

Notably in the last paragraph of section 1.4 it is stated that; "Based on the specific request from the parties, the primary focus of this ToR is to investigate the feasibility of the Red Sea-Dead Sea water conveyance alternative as the preferred interbasin transfer route." Though the plural word 'parties' is used here, to the best of knowledge of FoEME only the Government of Jordan has explicitly identified the Red Dead as a preferred route and only the Government of Jordan officially turned to the World Bank requesting that a ToR be prepared.

With the issue of who are the parties undefined and open to several interpretations (perhaps on purpose) it is of no surprise that attempts to articulate the overall objective or a shared vision for the project through out the ToR leaves the reader just as confused.

## **Shared Vision**

As presented in the heading of the ToR and articulated in section 1.2, the shared vision appears to be the building of a water conveyance project from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea for the purposes of “saving the Dead Sea, making drinking water available at affordable prices to Jordan Israel and the PNA and building a symbol of peace and cooperation in the Middle East.”

A knowledgeable reading of the above paragraph however questions whose vision precisely is described as the vision of the project. While Jordan, Israel and the PA appear to all strongly support the described results of the shared vision, that is saving the Dead Sea, provision of affordable water and peace and cooperation, at this time there is no agreement that the Red Dead conduit will support these results. FoEME would argue that it is presently only the vision of the Government of Jordan, with the governments of Israel and the PA having not drawn the necessary conclusion that they support the building of the Red Sea to Dead Sea conduit in order to share this vision. Therefore in section 1.1 which describes the ‘hope’ of this project, reference is really only to the hope of the Government of Jordan and individual Israeli government ministers at the time statements were made.

The World Bank authors of the ToR might be causing greater damage and confusion to the advance of the real issues at stake by not clarifying these two key points of ‘who are the parties’ and the ‘shared vision’ in a more upfront manner.

## **Who are the parties and what is their shared vision?**

FoEME would argue that the way to proceed on defining the parties to this project and the shared vision for the project requires us to focus on the key area of concern with that being the Dead Sea area. The core parties to the Dead Sea area are Jordan, Israel and the PA.<sup>[1]</sup> While Lebanon and Syria share the Jordan River basin and hence their water withdrawals impact the Dead Sea they have no national interest in the Dead Sea area itself. Their cooperation would be certainly beneficial particularly in exploring the possibility to reallocate water to flow down the River Jordan to the Dead Sea but only if such a project was considered first a viable solution for consideration. Similarly, Egypt and Saudi Arabia as riparians to the Gulf of Aqaba might be impacted by water withdrawals from the Red Sea but only if the Red Dead conduit was identified as a viable project to refill the Dead Sea.

From statements made by the three core parties to the Dead Sea area, being Jordan, Israel and the PA both publicly and privately the issue of concern that they share is the fate of the Dead Sea area and the economic and environmental impact of the continued decline of the Dead Sea water level with all its surface area ramifications such as sink holes. The shared vision as understood by FoEME and what needs to be clarified and confirmed by the three core parties is the promotion of sustainable development and management in the Dead Sea area.

## **The Sustainable Development of the Dead Sea Area**

The project that the World Bank should be commissioned to prepare a ToR should therefore focus on how to promote sustainable development around the Dead Sea area with all the alternative means to raise the water level considered but also other development issues. The water level alternatives would include the Red Dead conduit, the Med Dead conduit, restoring water flows down the River Jordan, a combination of restoring some water flow down the Jordan River and a smaller conduit project and the no water level action alternative. Furthermore other issues such as tourism development, cultural heritage protection, urban and rural settlement, industry and agriculture impacting the Dead Sea area must be investigated and considered. These development issues are over and beyond the question of raising the water level of the Dead Sea. To this extent investigation of World Heritage and Biosphere registration for the Dead Sea area and the development of an integrated management plan and authority need to be included in the ToR.

In the view of FoEME, investigating the promotion of sustainable development around the Dead Sea should be the issue of the project in question and therefore the focus of the World Bank ToR as this would better reflect the shared vision of all three-core parties. From a December 13, 2001, Jordan Times front page article His Majesty the King of Jordan ‘stresses the importance of Dead Sea Preservation.’ In the Johannesburg Summit and the Kyoto Water Forum, ‘Protecting the Dead Sea’ was the title of the Governments of Jordan and Israel presentations. Jordan, Israel and the PA have identified in writing the need for World Heritage consideration for the Dead Sea area.

Focusing on the sustainable development of the Dead Sea area as the focus of ToR would make better sense of the many sections of the current ToR that go into great detail concerning the lower River Jordan when the Red Dead conduit project alone would have no impact on the lower Jordan River nor the Jordan Valley.

### **B. Specific Comments to the ToR:**

#### **1. Introduction:**

**Section 1.1.** It is not known to FoEME that the Jordan Rift Valley has been declared a ‘Development Zone’ in any sense that has statutory or other legal meaning. The ‘Master Plan’ in question was heavily criticized by the parties and in any event was not adopted as a master plan in a statutory sense and therefore as presently written tends to mislead the reader as to the value given to this earlier work. The fact that the Red Dead conduit was studied is important to be noted but does not lead to any conclusion that might be inferred from the current text that it is accepted as part of a master plan for the area.

The final sentence including the word ‘hope’ is inappropriate for what should be an independent assessment to be undertaken.

**Section 1.2** As stated above the purpose of the project and the nature of the shared vision as well as who are the parties can not be inferred from international presentations and speeches but must be verified in writing at the cabinet level of the governments concerned. The RDP (Red Dead Project) referred to as a ‘major opportunity’ for ‘relationship building’ would only be true if the long-term interests of the parties are met by the project, but this is not clear. Focusing on the sustainable

development of the Dead Sea area as the subject of the project and the ToR would require the same if not greater cooperation, as the issues are even broader.

**Section 1.3** As suggested above the concept of the ToR must focus on the shared vision of the parties. The statement “..protecting a unique region of the world with cultural, religious and political significance” is far more relevant to promoting sustainable development than just raising the water level.

**Section 1.4** Though it is stated that the ToR must be carried out within a comprehensive development framework, the focus on the Red Dead conduit as the only issue to be in depth investigated prevents this from occurring.

**2. Strategic Approach** The public and civil society groups must be part of validating the shared vision and be given an opportunity to comment and influence the draft ToR before they are finalized.

### **3. Objectives and Structure**

**Section 3.1** The term ‘Saving the Dead Sea’ was coined by Friends of the Earth Middle East, to promote local and international awareness on the current state of the area. The term was coined in order to promote the restoration of the Dead Sea area and promote its sustainable development. The use of the term in the ToR is inappropriate particularly since the restoration of the Dead Sea area in a more sustainable manner is not an intangible benefit but one that has very many tangible benefits that have been and are being valued. The World Bank authors of the ToR should be made aware of a Friends of the Earth Middle East study supported by the IDRC in Canada relating to the opportunity costs of current usage of Dead Sea waters.

The ‘Peace Dividend’ benefit must be considered as available for any meaningful, long term, interest based project, equally as valid to the promotion of sustainable development around the Dead Sea area.

**Section 3.4** If “restoring the Dead Sea and creating a vehicle for cooperation” are the key objectives as stated under phasing of benefits then why are not all options of restoration considered. All conduit options, Jordan River flow and any combination of the two must be investigated with equal weight.

### **4. The Water Transfer Alternative**

#### **Section 4.2.3**

The many doubts here expressed as to the economic viability of the drinking water and energy benefits of a proposed conduit solution further support serious investigation of the restoration of the Jordan River flow at different levels as worth investigating. The amount of subsidy suggested for the conveyance should be considered in the release of water down the River Jordan to the Dead sea as an alternative.

## **5. Jordan Basin Water Resource Management**

**Section 5.1 and 5.2.2** The assumptions made here conclude that current unsustainable water use in the region can never be reversed. FoEME believes that this assumption is unfounded and is contrary to statements made in section 5.2.3 of the ToR. The ‘with reform and without reform’ scenarios if fully developed in respect of the water allocation to agriculture could justify the Jordan River water allocation option. In any event by focusing only on the solution proposed, unsustainable water use practices are more likely be further institutionalized. It should be noted that in section 10.21.2 reference is made in the ToR of the possibilities of increased water flows to the Dead Sea from the Jordan River.

The World Bank authors have not mentioned the impact of the Dead Sea extraction industries and their increase in water evaporation rates on the Dead Sea, accounting to up to 25% of the annual water loss of the Dead Sea. A whole new section is required to investigate the potential of water saving through an alternative mineral extraction process.

**Section 5.2.3** Some of the figures here quoted should be reviewed. Current water declines are 1-meter p.a. Under what basis do the authors state that the Dead Sea ‘may become practically extinct in this century.’ The World Bank authors should review the research of the Geological Survey of Israel that concludes that the Dead Sea level due to its high salinity will reach a new equilibrium and never dry up.

**Section 7.2.1** Cultural heritage protection requires more than raising the water level and the peace dividend can be brought about by several alternative cooperative scenarios such as a Dead Sea sustainable development project. World Heritage registration would here be a prerequisite. The task of the ToR must be to compare and evaluate these alternatives.

**Section 7.2.1.5** The continued decline of the Dead Sea water level is of direct benefit to the mineral extraction industry. This industry is fearful of any attempt to restore historic Dead Sea water levels.

## **8. Objectives and Structure**

‘Saving the Dead Sea’ is again here recognized as the broad goal of the project. Though this title is inappropriate, the goal of restoring and promoting sustainable development around the Dead Sea is again given credence as the real objective of the project and therefore should be specifically identified as such with the appropriate changes in scope applied.

**9. Environmental and Social Issues** Other issues to be considered include: potential increased humidity from any open canals; the impact of ruptures in pipes on the fresh water aquifers along Wadi Araba and the possibility that at later stages artificial lakes and lagoons with associated tourist infrastructure will be created by Jordan or Israel as a result of the conduit proposed to be built.

To the best of knowledge of FoEME the computer modeling of the impacts of mixing of the Red Sea with Dead Sea water is only partially funded and is an Israeli only research team. It will not be completed unless additional resources are invested. The assumption therefore that this research will

exist at the time of undertaking the feasibility study is unfounded.

A computer modeling of the marine ecology and water currents of the Gulf of Aqaba is required to assess the impact of water pumping at such high and sustained levels on the marine life of the Gulf of Aqaba.

The induced impacts of stabilizing the Dead Sea and therefore promoting unsustainable tourism development must rightly be considered. The issue though is that unsustainable tourism development is occurring presently irrespective of the decline in water level and hence the response needed is immediate and irrespective of the water level issue. Promoting a UNESCO Biosphere concept and World Heritage registration as part of developing an integrated management plan for the region is presently required. See FoEME document 'Let the Dead Sea Live, Concept Document towards the Dead Sea basin Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Listings.

### **10. and 11. Key Tasks**

A key task missing is the need to prepare a regional integrated management plan for the Dead Sea area and a strategy of how the parties would adopt and implement the plan.

As stated above the consultation process with the public must be initiated prior to ToR being completed as the ToR document sets the framework for discussions. The public should be represented in both the technical and the environmental and social advisory panels.

Finally concern is expressed that with key data and computer modeling of impacts yet to be developed the schedule for undertaking the ToR might be unrealistically short and needs to be extended. The bibliography attached is not sufficiently comprehensive.

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[1] Though the borders to the future State of Palestine are still to be negotiated which leads to uncertainty between Israel and the PA as to the Dead Sea itself there is no dispute that Jericho, several kilometers from the shores of the Dead Sea, under full PA jurisdiction is part of the Dead Sea area.