

## **Environmental organizations oppose Red-Dead Sea Canal: World Bank study is limited**

**The World Bank has invested \$15 million in a feasibility study, but the coalition of environmental organizations has complained that “the World Bank study is superficial and localized.” Unresolved issues include the impact on tourism, the mixture of different kinds of water, and an study of other alternatives. In any case, any solution to the state of the Dead Sea seems far off.**

Billy Frankel, NRG [Maariv Website], July 30, 2008

The World Bank held a public hearing today (Wednesday) as part of the study it is undertaking for Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority examining the feasibility of the Red-Dead Seas Canal project. During the hearing the coalition of environmental organizations claimed that the study is being conducted in an unprofessional and improper manner.

As will be recalled, the project advocates the establishment of a conduit system that will carry two billion cubic meters of water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, in order to solve the falling level of the Dead Sea and provide desalinated water to the region.

The World Bank has invested \$15 million in order to prepare a feasibility study examining the environmental impact of the project. The study will be completed in approximately one year. Two companies were selected to undertake the study – the British company ERM and the French company Coyne et Bellier.

At today’s hearing, the coalition of environmental organizations sharply criticized the manner in which the study has been conducted. The coalition demanded that the study be expanded, both in terms of the in-depth study of details and in terms of scope.

The coalition includes six environmental organizations – the Israel Union for Environmental Defense, Tzalul, Life and Environment, Friends of the Earth – Middle East, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, and Green Course. The grouping was established several months ago with the goal of preventing the promotion of the project in its current format without an study of the broad ramifications for the Dead Sea region, the Arava, and the Gulf of Eilat.

### **What about tourism?**

“The World Bank study is superficial and localized. It cannot provide an appropriate and proper response to the issue it examines,” explains Raanan Borel, the coordinator of the coalition of environmental organizations. Borel explains that the aim of the World Bank is to examine how best to establish the project, and not whether it should be built at all. “The Bank is concentrating on a single plan, and has not examined alternatives that deserve consideration and which could provide cheaper solutions in financial terms and in terms of damage to the environment and enhanced benefits in political terms.”

Borel adds that the study is based on long-term studies that disagree regarding the possible impact that will result from mixing the waters of the Red Sea and the Dead Sea. “Science does not have an answer on this question, and the timeframe does not permit sufficient time or money to fill in the gaps and provide a clear answer.”

The coalition also noted the problematic fact that the study does not address the impact of the plan on the tourism industry in the Dead Sea area. Any change in the composition of the water could have substantial ramifications in terms of the health properties of the water, thus effecting tourism in the area. They also noted that attention should be given to the fact that the implementation of a project on such a large scale could affect recognition of the Dead Sea as a world heritage site. The coalition added that all existing alternatives should be examined, and advocated doing everything possible to restore the former condition of the Dead Sea by rehabilitating the River Jordan and renewing the flow of water in the river.

The coalition further demanded that the Bank act in a fully transparent manner while pursuing its study and reveal all the documents relating to its agreements with the international consulting firms hired to undertake the scientific study. The member organizations of the coalition argue that the companies commissioned by the World Bank to undertake the study may be subject to economic and political pressure, resulting in conflict within these companies and impairing the quality of the study.

Lastly, the World Bank invited anyone who has any comments to make about the project to submit a written response by August 15<sup>th</sup> on the site and by email: [red.dead.study@erm.com](mailto:red.dead.study@erm.com).