

Environmental organizations: The World Bank's study of the Red-Dead Canal is being conducted unprofessionally and unsuitably

According to the coalition: "The Bank is focusing exclusively on the canal option as a means to Save the Dead Sea, and is not studying other alternatives on the table that could likely give solutions at less cost, with less environmental damage, and producing greater political benefits"

Shira Horesh, Globes, July 30, 2008

The World Bank held a Public Hearing on the Feasibility Study it is conducting on behalf of Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. This Study is to research the feasibility of the conduit / canal proposed to be built from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea that would raise the water level of the Dead Sea and supply desalinated water and / or hydro electric power to the region.

During the Public Hearing, the Environmental Coalition presented its stand on the issue. Ra'anana Boral, representing the Coalition, claimed that "the study being carried out by the World Bank is superficial and spotty and therefore will be unable to give sufficient and reliable answers to the complex issues at stake. The Bank is focusing exclusively on the canal option as a means to Save the Dead Sea, and is not studying other alternatives on the table that could likely give solutions at less cost, with less environmental damage, and producing greater political benefits".

The Coalition claims that a project of such implications as the proposed Conduit (dubbed the "Red Dead Canal") needs to be checked against other options, especially the northern option of bringing fresh water to the Dead Sea by rehabilitating the Lower Jordan River. The Bank is failing to study the likely effects of the canal on changing the nature of the Dead Sea and the possible disastrous impact on the tourism industry. Any change in the composition of Dead Sea waters could have a significant effect on health tourism.

In addition, the Coalition stated that such a project could negatively effect the registration of the Dead Sea as a World Heritage site by the three governments, which must be taken into account in any decision making process.

The Coalition demanded that The Bank act with full transparency in its management of the feasibility study. They called on The Bank to make public all documents as regards the scientific level of study to be undertaken by the international consultants. The organizations are concerned that the parties likely to be hired by The Bank, directly or indirectly, could be put under political and economic pressure, leading to conflicts of interest and consequently impair the quality of the research study.

Outside the Hearing venue, youth from Baka el Gharbia painted signs depicting the alternative of rehabilitating the Jordan River, a subject they have been learning about throughout the year.

The Coalition, which includes six major environmental organizations in Israel, was founded several months ago in order to prevent the advancement of the program as it is currently planned, which fails to evaluate the far-reaching consequences on the Dead Sea region, the Arava and the Gulf of Eilat.