

**Draft 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, 2004 Confidential Draft.**

These comments are submitted by Friends of the Earth Middle East to the World Bank and the three participating governments Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority in support of their efforts that would ‘Save the Dead Sea’ by promoting sustainable development. The comments made, though uninvited, reflect the legitimate concerns of civil society that any investigation carried out be comprehensive and independent, with principles of sustainability reflected in the core objectives espoused by the respective parties.

FoEME hopes that the comments made below will be considered and incorporated into the new draft ToR currently being prepared by the World Bank.

FoEME’s general comments are as follows:

**1. Investigating Alternatives**

Though the ToR identifies the primary goal of the project as saving the Dead Sea they fail to investigate all the possible scenarios that could reasonably be considered. These include restoring water flows along the lower Jordan River. Failure to investigate all reasonable alternatives results in decision makers not having the full body of information before them so that sound and responsible decision-making can take place. From the World Bank’s perspective such failure could constitute a breach of their due diligence requirements.

**2. Failure to Investigate Root Causes for the Demise of the Dead Sea.**

The ToR fails to even mention let alone suggest investigating the very cause for the dramatic decline in Dead Sea water levels. The demise of the Dead Sea is due to the impact of upstream water diversion projects and mineral extraction industries in the southern basin of the Dead Sea. A ToR that claims to have saving and restoring the Dead Sea as its prime aim without any examination of the causes behind the problem and whether they can be mitigated in the first place, puts the credibility of the whole study into real question.

Investigation of the root causes is essential in order to determine:

- a) All reasonable alternatives to the proposed project – a standard requirement of any ToR. In this case the rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River is a reasonable alternative to consider. The River

Jordan and its tributaries are the original source of water for the Dead Sea and the current management of those waters diverted need to be evaluated from an economic, ecological and social perspective.

b) The ToR will fail to properly undertake an economic assessment of costs and benefits if the costs and benefits of the current man made causes of the demise of the Dead Sea are not compared to the costs and benefits of the proposed project. An economic analysis of different water uses affecting the Dead Sea Basin recently undertaken under the supervision of Dr. Nir Becker from Haifa University concluded that the economic benefits due from the rehabilitation of the River Jordan appear to be comparable if not surpass the economic surplus to agriculture produced from Jordan River waters. The fact that the current draft of the ToR simply ignores the conclusion drawn from this study, questions due diligence procedures at the World Bank, as representatives of the World Bank attended the presentation of the study at a regional conference in Jordan.

c) The World Heritage – cultural, natural and tourism values of the Dead Sea are very much related to the existing mineral composition of Dead Sea waters. This unique Dead Sea mineral composition will certainly be altered by the release of waters whose sources are other than the Jordan River basin. In this regard in the section titled **6.3.1 Tasks** - under Task 1.2 Tourism Industry - an additional task required must be to evaluate the impact of the change of composition of Dead Sea waters on tourism and especially health tourism to the Dead Sea. In any event cultural heritage protection requires more than raising the water level of the Dead Sea. World Heritage registration of the Dead Sea basin should be listed in the ToR as a prerequisite for any project that claims to have saving the Dead Sea as its prime objective.

d) The many doubts actually expressed in the ToR 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 project should be compared with current subsidies granted to the agricultural sectors in Israel and Jordan and therefore their removal for the release of water down the River Jordan to the Dead Sea as an alternative.

### **3. Irreversible Damage.**

The ToR repeatedly mentions irreversible damages and a disaster situation to the Dead Sea area without substantiating any scientific sources for such predictions. Any assessment carried out based on the ‘no project’ option must focus on the best science available to assess the impacts of continued water level decline. While not belittling the damage occurring the current ToR appears to exaggerate the situation. Furthermore serious damage is presently occurring around the Dead Sea for reasons other than the decline of Dead Sea water levels such as the over pumping of aquifers threatening springs such as Ein Feshka and Ein Gedi. Reluctance to undertake a comprehensive investigation of the issues involved in saving the Dead Sea place into questions the credibility of any report produced.

### **4. Promoting Sustainable Development**

Promoting the sustainable development of the Dead Sea as a prime objective receives no mention in the ToR. 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. 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.

## **5. Institutionalizing Unsustainable Water Use Practices**

If the Red Dead Conduit option is supported without a study of current water resource use in the Basin, there will be no incentive to cease current unsustainable water use practices in the region. On the contrary the building of the RDC without a comprehensive framework for sustainable water management is likely to further institutionalize inefficient water allocation to the agricultural sector. This result would be contrary to the World Bank's many recommendations concerning the mismanagement of water resources in the region particularly as concerning provision of fresh water to the agricultural sector in Israel and Jordan. This is such a serious failure of the current ToR that it too could constitute a breach of the Bank's due diligence requirements.

## **6. The Precautionary Principle and Special Risks**

The precautionary principle must be accepted and incorporated into the analyses undertaken. Due to the reliance on two computer models being required – on the mixing of the waters of the Red Sea in the Dead Sea and on the impact of water extraction on the head of the Gulf of Aqaba (not mentioned to date in the ToR) a level of uncertainty must be taken into consideration that the computer models might fail. Since the impact of building the proposed project could lead to irreversible negative consequences for the Dead Sea, Arava and Gulf of Aqaba the precautionary principle requires that the real possibility that models fail be given extra weight in any final analysis.

## **7. Public Participation**

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. Participatory democracy requires that the respective governments consult with interested parties domestically prior to determining their positions. The governments have not consulted with the public and the World Bank has not insisted that they do so. The public should be represented in the technical, environmental and social advisory panels.