

27 June, 2022

Excellencies, Colleagues,

Israel's Mediterranean and Red Sea coastlines, stretching a total of 205 kilometers, are among the country's most valuable natural assets. Nearly 70% of the population and much of the country's economic and commercial activity, as well as a rich diversity of natural, environmental, cultural values are concentrated along these coastal strips.

Amazingly enough, this marine environment had suffered limitless amounts of terrestrial, seaborne and airborne polluting substances, for years. This environment simply cannot absorb any more. It is our collective duty to restore it to its life supporting role. Since the mid 1990's Israel took action in exactly this route.

Allow me to describe some of the steps we are taking.

Marine Protected Areas

Conserve ocean biodiversity and ecosystems, improve long-term food security, and prevent over-fishing activities. We look up to the call for 30% ocean protection by 2030 as was decided by CBD COP15.

Two weeks ago, the Minister of Environmental Protection started the process to declare the "Palmachim Disturbance" sea area within the Israeli EEZ, as an MPA. This unique area of a rectangular 450sqkm, will double the protected area under Israel's jurisdiction. It consists of endangered deep-sea shark species, vast nursery grounds of several cnidarian assemblages considered highly susceptible, sea pens, cold-water corals, and black corals. Researchers documented the presence of cold seep chemosynthetic communities and Bluefin Tuna aggregations during their reproductive season, were reported in this area.

Marine Industrial Pollution

from land-based sources was historically, a serious problem. During the last 25 years, having set ambitious reduction goals, we managed to reduce dramatically pollution loads up to 95-99%. Out of seven registered hotspots, Israel is left with one. It is located in the beautiful coastal area near the city of Acco. This previously PVC industrial plant left a legacy of untreated mercury waste which had seeped into the soil, the underground waters and to the Mediterranean sea. Lately, this area was purchased by a private company. A clean up survey and rehabilitation plan was devised together with government agencies and the plan is set to go to prevent further mercury pollution.

Marine Litter Pollution

Is yet a current huge challenge. "Clean Coast Program" is Israel's national action plan to decrease marine litter, especially plastics, developed in accordance with the regional reduction plan of marine litter, of the Barcelona Convention.

This multi-layer program mitigates the impact of marine litter on the coastline of Israel, by operating in six intertwined axes: publicity campaigns; enforcement activities; educational activities; marine monitoring of plastics; prevention at source; regular coastal cleanup.

Routine, result-oriented, cleanup activities, financed by the Ministry of Environmental Protection are measured regularly and rated by the Clean Coast Index (CCI). The target measured by the index was set to be 70% of clean coasts at least 70% of time. Last year's results showed an unprecedented mark of 74% clean coasts. Therefore we reset the target to be 75%.

Prevention at source, with legal measures like the Plastic bags Law and the Packaging Law, supported the reduction of polluting plastic bags by 65%.

Seawater Desalination

Was Israel solution to overcome its serious shortage of drinking water, by construction of 5 facilities (with 2 more under construction) that produces over 65% of its potable water.

However, desalination brine has an effect on the marine environment. Luckily monitoring shows the impact is local. Also, there is a knowledge gap as to the impact of the intake seawater, where the facility “cleans” the seawater from its natural micro-organisms (that makes the primary production of the food web).

The government initiated a 2-year research project to determine the joint impact of all of Israel’s desalination plants along the Mediterranean shore. Therefore, careful conduct must be maintained at all times.

Cooperation and partnerships

Israel is an active member of the Barcelona Convention to protect the Mediterranean basin.

The Mediterranean countries joined forces to turn the region into a sulphur emissions control area which obliges ships to use low sulphur fuel (which produces less sulfuric acids), saving human lives and benefiting the marine environment. Last week, the Israeli parliament approved the Regulations of Air Pollution Prevention from Ships, which will enable Israel to fully apply the Annex 6 of the MARPOL convention.

Also, we actively participate in the INTERPOL’s marine enforcement programmes to fight offshore crimes leading to marine pollution. Our inspection and enforcement program checks at least 20% of the ships calling Israeli ports, for compliance with the international maritime conventions.