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'Water reserves may be drained by 2010'

By: EHUD ZION WALDOKS on: 20.10.2009 [16:32] (344 reads)

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Oct 20, 2009 1:16 | Updated Oct 20, 2009 10:52

'Water reserves may be drained by 2010'

By EHUD ZION WALDOKS

If this winter is as lacking in rainfall as the last one, then by next summer Israel will have to take drastic steps such as importing water and setting up portable desalination plants, officials believe.

This shot of the Sea of Galilee, with the Kinneret College in the foreground, clearly shows the extent of the water crisis.

Photo: Courtesy

SLIDESHOW: Israel & Region | World Even if the winter is a rainy one, there will still be a serious crisis, according to the Water Authority's prognosis for the coming year.

The authority's head, Prof. Uri Shani, will testify about its plan for 2010 and reply to the questions of the National Investigation Committee Regarding the Water Crisis in Israel in Haifa on Tuesday afternoon.

The committee made the plan and Shani's responses to previous questions available ahead of his testimony.

Prof. Dan Bein, who chairs the committee, and members Prof. Yoram Avnimelech and Prof. Yoav Kislev invited Shani to testify again, so as to ensure that there would be no policy zigzags this coming year, as there were last year, they said in a statement.

The Water Authority is preparing for this winter on the assumption that it will be as bad as the last. All of the measures that they have undertaken so far will remain in effect, including the drought levy.

If this winter provides enough rain, then the levy will be canceled, Shani reiterated to the Knesset Finance Committee on Monday.

The difference this year is that the country is starting out with water levels up to a meter lower than last year.

What that means is that while Israel might weather this winter by continuing its current policies, all of the minuscule reserves will be used up and the reservoirs will be dangerously low by next year - so low that other sources of water will have to be found.

Acknowledging that possibility, the Foreign Ministry, at the behest of the Water Authority, has been in contact with Turkey about shipping water across the Mediterranean Sea. There were talks on and off for much of the past decade about importing water from Turkey, but they were eventually discarded because it would be more expensive to import water than to desalinate it.

However, the desalination project, while moving along, won't be able to ease the water crisis until 2013. In the meantime, extreme temporary measures may be needed and so talks with Turkey have been resumed.

It would take an estimated 12 to 18 months for 30 million cubic meters of fresh water to hit Israel's shores, Shani wrote.

Once agreements had been reached and technical issues overcome, entry points at the desalination plants in Palmahim and Hadera - where the infrastructure is already in place - could accommodate 30 million cubic meters each per year, and when Ashdod was ready in

2012-3, it could accommodate another 30 million cubic meters.

Another drastic option the Water Authority is considering is setting up portable desalination plants at various points along the coast. It is a drastic option because water from such plants would cost double the current price.

The past few years have seen just 70 percent of the average amount of rainfall in Israel, according to the authority. Lake Kinneret is five meters below the top red line. Even if this winter is a good one, yielding 1.6 meters of rain into the Kinneret or more, the lake will still be several meters below the upper red line.

Therefore, the water crisis will likely continue until desalination plants are more widely deployed in 2013. By that time, five desalination plants will be producing 600 million cubic meters of water a year.

That addition will enable the government to allow the natural reservoirs to regain their losses, rather than being pumped to the brink of irreparable damage year after year.

In any case, by the end of 2010, nearly twice as much desalinated water will be produced as is today. Right now, the Ashkelon plant produces 112 million cubic meters per year and the Palmahim plant produces another 37 million. An agreement has been reached to have the two plants produce 57 million cubic meters more by mid-2010.

Of even more significance, the Hadera plant is expected to come online next month and begin to produce 115 million cubic meters a year at the beginning of next year.

The Water Authority is in negotiations to increase the Ashkelon and Palmahim capacity by an additional 30 million cubic meters by having them run all the time, rather than making use of off-peak electricity. By the end of 2010, then, Israel could be desalinating 300 million cubic meters per year.

And yet, even with all that extra capacity, the water debt will still be steep and demand will still exceed supply, according to the Water Authority's projections.

On a somewhat brighter note, the Water Authority's measures have produced significant savings, according to initial assessments of the 2008/9 hydrological year that ends this month. The goal was to reduce consumption to 91 cubic meters per person per year.

While the Water Authority initially considered that goal very ambitious, it appears that consumption was reduced to 89 cubic meters per person per year, Shani wrote. In contrast, if the drought levy is lifted, then the authority expects consumption to balloon to 97 cubic meters per capita.

Agriculture also came in 9 million cubic meters under its allotment and industry came in 2 million cubic meters under. If this coming winter is a good one, then the allotment for agriculture will likely be increased, Shani wrote.

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Maybe...

by Invictus on 20.10.2009 [20:40]

they'll soon make another attempt to seize the Litani.

Good for peace in the ME.

by gmmonko on 20.10.2009 [21:09]

...once the Zionist state is gone, peace will come.

religion sucks!