**Parking Lots for Yachts Instead of Beaches** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/4390**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/4390)

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

Oceans and Beaches

The Story in 100 Words

The Campaign in Numbers

The Full Story

The State of the Campaign

More Campaigns

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/4390#intro>

What would you think if someone suggested building a car parking lot in the Yarkon Park, Jerusalem Forest, or Har Meiron Nature Reserve? You would probably think that this is a really bad idea, and rightly so.

Yet, this is exactly what will likely happen to our beaches. There is a plan in place to build six new marinas, which are literally parking lots for yachts and sailing boats.

An ongoing campaign by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, with the support of our members, led to an official recommendation to reject the building of most of these marinas. Read the full story of the campaign, and find out what else we can do to protect the beaches for us all.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/4390#small-fight-in-nums>

**The campaign against building the marinas, in numbers**

150 km

The length of undeveloped beaches along Israel’s Mediterranean coast, excluding infrastructure, industry, and military installations

1 km2

The average area each new marina takes away from Israel’s beaches

1.6 cm2 per citizen

The area of beach available to each citizen of Israel today, compared to 20 cm2 per citizen when the country was established

13 countries

Only 13 countries have more crowded beaches than Israel. All of these countries have either incredibly high population density, or very little beach area relative to the size of that country

80% of the marina area is private

In the plan to establish new marinas and expand existing marinas, the overwhelming majority of the area is designated for mooring private yachts and sailing ships

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/4390#sf-story>

3. The Full Story

**The full story on the marinas**

Going to the beach is one of the most fun, free, and accessible ways to spend time—Israelis love going to the beach. The problem is that the beaches are really crowded. Just try finding space for your towel on a Saturday morning and you’ll understand how crowded it really is.

This problem didn’t come from nowhere. Israel’s coastal strip along the Mediterranean Sea is 200 km long and currently, about one-quarter of it is occupied by infrastructure, industry, and military or security uses.

Further, Israel is a highly densely populated country and has the lowest amount of beach area available per citizen, globally. The crowdedness of the beaches affects most Israelis; the majority of people live nearby the sea so they can spend time there, as they wish.

Our calculations at the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel show that this problem is worsening with time: at the time of the country’s establishment, each citizen could enjoy 30 cm2 of the Mediterranean coastal beach, whereas today, they must be content with only 1.6 cm2 per person.

**Harm to the environment—and beachgoers**

Now, let’s look at the plan to build six new marinas in Israel—in Nahariya, Haifa, Hadera, Netanya, Tel Aviv, and Bat Yam—which was almost approved, yet stopped, due only to the campaign by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

Did you know that each of these marinas, which moor approximately 1,000 yachts, could steal away about one kilometer of beach? Basically, to satisfy a small number of yacht owners, we steal the sea from tens of thousands of Israelis who won’t be able to relax, swim, or have fun in it.

Not only do marinas prevent people from accessing the sea, but they also have an impact on nature and the environment. For example, marinas damage nesting sites for sea turtles and prevent sand from reaching the nearby beaches, thus causing the sandy beach strip to recede. Moreover, the breakwaters that are built for protecting the marinas cover areas of the sea with sand, which impacts the animals and plants living there.

Don’t be fooled, building marinas isn’t even economical and requires a subsidy from the State, which can come in the form of allocating additional coastal areas to entrepreneurs for construction and commerce near the beach, or land in other places. Already, some of the existing marinas have not been profitable ventures.

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel believes that people can make do with the large existing marinas; they can be expanded, improved, and made more efficient to provide a reasonable solution for existing and future needs. According to our estimates, these operations could almost double the number of mooring plots. Thanks to our campaign, the members of the National Planning and Building Committee understood that the new building plan was problematic.

**Water sports instead of yachts**

Sometimes, the marina developers claim that this is in fact a novel way to benefit the public by promoting marine education and sports. Don’t let them sway you; nearly all of the existing marina plots are used for mooring private yachts, not for such public purposes.

Currently, there are about 2,500 mooring plots in Israel. The plan promoted by the Israel Port Authority, an agency supported by the Ministry of Transportation, suggests adding another 5,000 plots by establishing new marinas, expanding the existing ones, and improving their efficiency. According to the plan, about 80% of the new mooring plots will be allocated to private yachts and sailboats. The remaining 20% of plots, at most, will be allocated to sailing vessels for education and water sports.

Of course, education and water sports can and should be promoted; but this can be done within the existing marinas, especially if they are to be expanded and made more efficient, without the need to establish new marinas.

Building new parking lots for yachts mustn’t take priority in a country lacking beach space. Instead of subsidizing new marinas, the government needs to provide a solution for the many Israelis who simply want to relax, do sports, or just sit on the beach—but don’t have enough space to do so.

**For further reading**

A win for the sea: “Only” one of the six marinas will be established (article on Ynet)

The Planning Administration recommends establishing only one marina (article in The Marker)

Who needs new marinas? (article in Globes magazine)

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/4390#current-state>

The sub-committee of the National Planning and Building Committee adopted the approach suggested by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel and decided that it is more important to protect the undeveloped beaches than to build new marinas.

Currently, the plan to build one new marina, instead of the six outlined in the original plan, will be tabled in a sitting of the national committee.

With the help of all our members, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel will continue to campaign against the harming of marine nature in Israel, to protect the coastal areas that serve millions of Israelis.

More Campaigns to Protect the Oceans

5. More Campaigns <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/4390#more-posts>

**Do you want to help us protect the oceans and beaches?**

**Become members and nature protectors**

Join now

**The Campaign to Save the Dusky Grouper** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3776**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3776)

**The Story in 100 Words**

**The Campaign in Numbers**

**The Full Story**

**The State of the Campaign**

**More Campaigns**

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

**Oceans and Beaches**

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3776#intro>

The Story in 100 Words

Most of us are familiar with grouper on the grill, in the oven, or in chraimeh. But are any of us aware of the great concern that this unique fish may disappear and the potential consequent dangers to marine nature in Israel?

The dusky grouper is very important for the entire environment in which it lives. Even partial disappearance may have a great impact because the entire system of flora and fauna in the rocky reef depends on it.

We are hunting, eating, and decimating the dusky grouper—and thus endangering the entire environment in which it lives.

Let’s read the incredible, unique life story of the dusky grouper, a predatory fish nicknamed “the leopard of the Mediterranean Sea”.

We’re sure, that once you know its story, you’ll also want to join the campaign to help it thrive and protect the health of the entire marine system in which it lives.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3776#small-fight-in-nums>

**The Dusky Grouper in Numbers**

90%

the decrease in the grouper population in the Mediterranean Sea in the last two decades

7

the youngest age at which the dusky grouper turns from female to male. This change takes place at a younger age than desired due to overfishing

50

the age dusky groupers can reach if they are not hunted

90%

of the populations of large fish in the Mediterranean Sea have disappeared, including species of grouper

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3776#sf-story>

The Full Story on the Dusky Grouper

The dusky grouper, also known as “the leopard of the Mediterranean Sea, is one of the most unique fish species alive. You don’t want to miss its wonderful story.

This predatory fish lives in rocky reefs and hides in the caves and niches in the rock. Unfortunately, one of the most prominent and unusual traits of this fish is exacerbating the threats to its survival.

All dusky groupers begin their lives as females, similarly to all other grouper species. They reach sexual maturity at the age of 3–4, once they have reached a length of 40–50 cm, or even more.

Under normal circumstances, at the age of 9–16, some of the female groupers undergo an interesting change—they become males. Under conditions of overfishing, such as in Israel, which reduce the grouper population, the change takes place much sooner—as early as the age of 7—even though the female groupers are not yet ready for it.

Those same fish that become males are already relatively large and therefore particularly attractive for fishing. The significance is that fishing has an impact mainly on males.

This is a great problem for the groupers: fishing disrupts the balance in their population. On the one hand, fishing leads to a lack of males. On the other hand, fishing forces females to reach sexual maturity when they are too young, when they have half the number of eggs of a mature female. The sex imbalance “urges” them to change into males at a younger age, to compensate for the fish that have been eliminated.

When life’s bad for the groupers—all of marine nature suffers

The result is sad and unfortunate: far fewer groupers in the sea. The significance of this situation is detrimental to all of our marine nature.

As long as there are many large groupers in the environment the rocky reefs in which they live are in a much better state. But when the groupers disappear, the entire system of flora and fauna in the environment is weakened.

The groupers are the protectors of the rocky reefs. For example, the groupers can reduce the invasion of the common lionfish and minimize the damaging effect of invasive fish such as rabbitfishes, which destroy the algal forest of the reefs.

Such is the great importance of the dusky grouper and the other grouper species: when they are abundant, and particularly when there are many large and mature individuals, all of marine nature is balanced and thrives—and without them, we all suffer the consequences.

Easy prey for fishermen

Spring is the most sensitive time for groupers. They tend to group together in spawning aggregations to reproduce; some fishermen capitalize on this situation to easily grab a large number of fish.

The result is a collapse in the numbers of all species of groupers. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates that groupers are on track for elimination, and have reached an extreme level of over 90% decline within two decades. Therefore, as a result of this threat to groupers worldwide, the IUCN has classified them as “Vulnerable”.

The situation is also bad in the Mediterranean Sea. According to estimates, the dusky grouper is classified as “Endangered” in the Mediterranean Sea due to overfishing.

However, if we are able to extricate ourselves from overfishing, some of the groupers would be able to reach old age and live for 50 years, or more.

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3776#current-state>

The State of the Campaign

Now that we are familiar with the unique story and importance of the dusky grouper, how can we idly stand by and watch as it disappears from the Mediterranean Sea? We cannot take the chance that the grouper will stop protecting our marine nature.

All groupers have great importance for the maintenance of balance in marine nature, including the dusky grouper and the golden grouper (the only one to be classified as a protected natural asset, as of 2021).

To give a chance to this unique fish that is important to all of marine nature, three urgent actions are required; the experience of other countries has proven that they are possible and effective:

1. The Ministry for Environmental Protection must declare all groupers as protected natural assets. It is especially important to give this protection status to the dusky grouper—which protects all of the marine nature in its surroundings.
2. Fishing of the dusky grouper must be stopped.
3. Even before a policy change comes into effect, we as consumers can shape our desired reality by immediately stopping to buy and eat dusky groupers (and, in general, minimizing consumption of wild fish and animals).

More Campaigns to Protect the Oceans

More Campaigns to Protect the Oceans

**Stopping the Crude Oil Disaster in the Gulf of Eilat** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933)

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

Oceans and Beaches

Open Landscapes

The Story in 100 Words

The Campaign in Numbers

The Full Story

The State of the Campaign

More Campaigns

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933#intro>

Nearly every Israeli is familiar with the spectacular, unique coral reef in the Gulf of Eilat, and many have visited or dived there.

Unfortunately, Israel is currently promoting a project that poses a substantial threat to the corals. Not only the corals are in danger, but so are many other natural wonders throughout the landscapes from the Gulf of Eilat and through the Negev to Ashkelon.

The threatening cause is a project that is being planned for unprecedented expansion of the amount of crude oil that reaches the Gulf of Eilat. From there, the crude oil will flow through a long, old, and dilapidated pipe to the Mediterranean Sea. Serious faults have already occurred in this pipe, causing serious damage to humans and the environment.

Another problem, is that the crude oil pipe is managed by a government company, the Europe Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC), which hides its intentions by never fully exposing its activities to the public, let alone to government ministers or Knesset members.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933#small-fight-in-nums>

**The Crude Oil Pipeline in Numbers**

1959

establishment of the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline. In 1969, the pipeline’s diameter was expanded, and since has been owned by EAPC

254

km

the length of the pipeline

10

million tons of crude oil

the maximum amount that flowed through the pipeline during the 1970s

30

million tons of crude oil

the potential amount of crude oil in the new agreement, according to EAPC publications

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933#sf-story>

The Full Story on the Pipeline

Alongside the signing of peace agreements with the UAE in 2020, an agreement was also signed for the transfer of particularly large amounts of crude oil from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Eilat. From there, the crude oil is supposed to flow through a dilapidated old pipeline that crosses Israel northwards to Ashkelon.

Until now, five to seven tankers reach the Gulf of Eilat each year and empty their contents into the pipeline. According to this megalomanic plan, as far as we know, this number will increase to dozens of tankers per year. Most details of the plan remain a mystery because the agreement is confidential. What is certain, is that we are dealing with a tremendous risk to the environment.

The old pipeline was built in the 1960s and is run down and decrepit. Similar to many other issues related to the company operating the pipeline, EAPC, the public has very limited access to information, an issue upon which we will elaborate.

Nonetheless, we do know a few things: many researchers and scientists argue that the maintenance of the pipeline is inadequate. According to the findings of tests performed over the years, the pipeline wall has considerably worn away, and in some places, up to 70% of the pipeline’s thickness has corroded. It is also known that an additional pipeline, which extends from Ashkelon to Haifa, also exhibits extensive corrosion damage.

Despite the worrying findings, the problematic pipeline continues to be used to transfer crude oil under government approval. The proposed amount of oil to flow through the pipeline, according to the new plans, will reach unprecedented levels.

Old, long pipelines are known for faults, and the resulting significance is shocking: crude oil leaks have a devastating impact on unique natural assets. These would include—first and foremost—the coral reefs of Eilat, and also entire ecosystems and vast landscapes that the pipeline passes through on its way to Ashkelon, which are home to a diversity of animals and plants.

Of course, such an event will also have an impact on humans; oil leaks could occur in the EAPC Port in Ashkelon. This would pollute dozens of square kilometers of the Mediterranean Sea and its beaches, as far as Tel Aviv, Haifa, Rosh Hanikra, and even beyond Israel’s waters.

A history of environmental damage

We must emphasize, that shocking scenarios of crude oil leaks are not unfounded. Cumulative evidence over several years has revealed that EAPC has been responsible for many leaks, some of which were hidden from the public.

A severe leak that shocked the public was the Evrona Disaster in 2014. The EAPC pipeline cracked near Be’er Ora, about 20 km north of Eilat. The leakage occurred during maintenance work as part of operations to establish the Ramon Airport. Approximately five million liters of crude oil flowed throughout the night and into Evrona Nature Reserve.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection classified the event as one of the most severe environmental disasters in the country’s history. The great damage to the diversity of plants and animals in the nature reserve was estimated at over 100 million NIS. Rehabilitation of the reserve continues until today and the level of soil pollution from the leak is still very high.

Moreover, the nature reserve was impacted by a crude oil leak in 1975, and the damage from that disaster is still felt today. The plants and animals living in the affected area have not yet been fully rehabilitated, even though decades have passed since the leak.

If tens of millions of takers of crude oil reach the Gulf of Eilat each year, the risk of faults rises significantly—and is incredibly concerning. We must do everything possible to prevent this from happening.

In July 2021, an appeal was submitted to the High Court against the new agreement with EAPC; the appeal was submitted by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, together with organizations Zalul and Adam Teva V’Din. In response, EAPC claimed that the chance of a leak was negligible; according to the assessment it submitted to the court, a leak is only expected to occur “once in 1,111 years”.

It turns out, that reality is much less comforting than the promises made by EAPC. Only one month had passed since the “once in 1,111 years” claim, and another leak was found in the pipeline near Ashkelon, which polluted 5,000 tons of soil over an area of approximately 3 dunams.

The secret agreement

The new agreement to transfer large quantities of crude oil through the pipeline was signed between EAPC and Red Med, a company from the UAE. This is another layer of secrecy in EAPC’s conduct, which usually acts far from the public eye, without transparency or supervision.

EAPC (which was previously called Eilat-Ashkelon Pipeline Company and is now called Europe-Asia Pipeline Company) is a government company that was established as part of the collaboration between Israel and the Shah regime of Iran. Among other things, the company built the pipeline from the Gulf of Eilat to Ashkelon (the Mediterranean coast) as an alternative to transferring crude oil in tankers through the Suez Canal.

EAPC was established under a screen of confidentiality. The company was registered in Canada and received various financial benefits. As such, the Planning and Building Law does not apply to EAPC and it received an exemption from paying taxes. The Mandatory Tenders Law also doesn’t apply to EAPC, whose leaders are appointed without a tender; usually, only retired military personnel and government officials receive such appointments.

The government prefers to reveal as little information as possible about what happens in EAPC. This is true not only for the general public but also for Knesset members and government ministers. Decisions concerning EAPC, such as the new agreement with the Emirates, are made in private meetings between the directors of government ministries and high-level officials.

As far as we know, the economic aims of the new agreement are similar to those for which EAPC was established several decades ago. Transferring crude oil through a pipeline saves having to sail the tankers from the UAE around Africa or through the crowded Suez Canal, whose shallow depth does not permit entry of large tankers.

According to EAPC, this agreement brings profit to Israel, yet we have no way of verifying this or any other claim regarding such agreements that are hidden from the public. However, we are certain that its implementation may cause an environmental disaster.

Danger to corals

The main concern raised by the oil transfer agreement is the coral reef in Eilat, a beautiful tourist destination and diving site. This is the northernmost reef in the world, and according to scientific estimates, it may be the only one to survive the climate crisis.

Throughout the world, coral reefs suffer a phenomenon known as bleaching, which can lead to their dying of starvation. Bleaching occurs when the algae that live on the corals and provide them with their main source of food, are destroyed. These algae are colorful; therefore, their disappearance causes the corals to look white.

It seems that the main cause of bleaching is the climate crisis and ocean warming. Due to reasons that are still not completely clear, the reefs in the Red Sea—in Aqaba, Eilat, and Sinai—have developed resistance to bleaching. Scientists believe that the reason for this is genetic resilience to living at higher temperatures. Therefore, they may be able to survive even if the water becomes warmer due to the climate crisis.

All this means that the reef in Eilat is important not just for us; it is a natural treasure of global significance. It may be one of the only places left in the world where we will be able to observe and study a healthy coral reef.

But one small crude oil leak could completely destroy it. If we add to this the government’s lack of preparedness for emergencies in coping with pollution, it’s clear that such a disaster could spell the end of the Gulf of Eilat.

The Gulf of Eilat is home to hundreds of species of fish and other marine organisms. The species richness in the gulf stems from its being an inlet with relatively gentle waves and thanks to that it has rarely suffered pollution. The resulting clear, beautiful waters allow the sun’s rays to penetrate the depths, which have become a fertile habitat for fishes and corals.

Don’t be fooled, the damage from an oil leak will not stop at fishes and corals. Tourism in Eilat depends, among other things, on tourists visiting and diving near the reef. Damage to the reef could cause a terrible economic blow. Therefore, the Eilat Municipality is one of the prominent opponents of the agreement.

Concern for an environmental disaster throughout Israel

Beyond the great dangers to the coral reef and the Gulf of Eilat, a leak along the pipeline in the Negev desert may cause heavy damage to extensive open landscapes in Israel, as happened in the Evrona disaster.

The Association of Public Health Physicians has previously highlighted the harm to the health of the residents of Ashkelon and its surroundings due to different facilities operated by EAPC there.

As an example: an oil leak could occur when loading the oil from the pipeline onto ships in the EAPC port in Ashkelon, or during the ships’ departure from the port. Such an event would cause severe pollution in the Mediterranean Sea over dozens of square kilometers and impact fishing and beaches as far as the north of the country.

This concern is of even greater importance than the disaster that occurred in February 2021, which was apparently caused by a ship from the Persian Gulf that poured hundreds of tons of crude oil into the Mediterranean Sea, adjacent to Israel’s coast. The event was classified as one of the most severe ecological disasters in the country’s history. It caused the death of fishes, birds, and marine organisms, and the entire country’s beaches were closed-off.

In December 2021, an appeal to the High Court (that was submitted by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel together with organizations Zalul and Adam Teva V’Din), demanding that the oil agreement be stopped, was withdrawn once the government transferred authority for the decision on this issue to the Ministry for Environmental Protection.

The Prime Minister’s Office declared that the government is not authorized to nullify the oil agreement. Nevertheless, it was decided that the Ministry for Environmental Protection, which opposes the agreement, would be the agency that deals with this issue on behalf of the government. Hence, the Ministry decided that the amount of oil flowing in the pipeline should be greatly restricted.

Currently, the legal process has been completed—but the public battle against this dangerous agreement continues in full force. We can and must stop the flow of crude oil through the dilapidated, old pipeline to protect the Gulf of Eilat, the Mediterranean Sea, and all of the natural landscapes between Eilat and Ashkelon.

Photos: Orel Ravivo, Erez Atir, Omri Salner, Noam Weiss, and Dov Greenblatt

Further Reading

The Website for the Campaign to Stop the Crude Oil Plan

Petition to Stop the Plan to Increase the Amount of Crude Oil in the Gulf of Eilat

EAPC said, “once in a thousand years”. So they said

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/2933#current-state>

The State of the Campaign

The campaign is at its peak. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, together with a coalition of dozens of environmental organizations and residents of Eilat and Ashkelon, has declared that we must completely cancel the agreement to increase the amounts of crude oil reaching the Gulf of Eilat and flowing through the long, old, and dilapidated pipeline to Ashkelon.

This plan could lead to a disaster that would harm countless unique natural treasures, extensive open landscapes, and the residents of the entire country—thus we must stop it.

In Israel, as around the world, awareness of environmental issues is on the rise as part of the response to the global climate crisis. Unfortunately, despite the decision to restrict the amount of crude oil flowing in the pipeline, the Israeli Government continues to promote the agreement to transfer environmentally harmful fuels which contribute to global warming and endanger the unique coral reef in the Gulf of Eilat.

We are continuing our campaign in full force against the agreement and you’re welcome to join us.

More Campaigns

The Campaign for the Deep Sea <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/830>

**A Wonder Beneath the Water: The Campaign for the Deep Sea**

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

Oceans and Beaches

The Story in 100 Words

The Campaign in Numbers

The Full Story

The State of the Campaign

More Campaigns

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/830#intro>

Are you ready to dive deep into places most people can’t reach? Come meet the deep sea—a unique, cold, and dark kingdom of coral gardens and unique fishes that have learned to live under almost impossible conditions. All of these treasures are found close by, in the depths of the Mediterranean Sea, within Israel’s economic waters.

So far, so good—but there are great threats to the deep sea. We might even destroy it if we don’t hurry to safeguard its future.

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/830#small-fight-in-nums>

**The Deep Sea in Numbers**

22,000

km2

the area of Israel’s economic waters—a tremendous area equal to the entire land area of the country

200

m

the depth at which the deep sea begins, and reaches 1,200 m below the sea surface in the eastern Mediterranean Sea

60%

of the earth’s surface

is covered by deep sea, at 1,600 m deep and beyond. Since it is very hard to reach, we are familiar with only a tiny part of it

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/830#sf-story>

The Full Story on the Deep Sea

The deep sea is tremendous and covers most of the Earth’s surface. Even in Israel, there is a vast deep sea. Israel’s economic waters, which stretch for dozens of kilometers from the country’s coast and reach depths of hundreds of meters, are equal in size to Israel’s entire land surface.

We humans are only beginning to become familiar with this beautiful, wild environment. The reason for this is that in order to dive down to the deep sea without harming it we need expensive and technologically advanced robots. Israel acquired these means less than a decade ago.

Despite this, it is clear that this is a very delicate habitat. The sun’s light does not penetrate the deep sea; therefore, it’s difficult to create food down there. The pace of life is very slow, and every change in the environment has a dramatic impact on the rare plants and animals that live there. Any small, careless action by humans may cause great damage for decades ahead and is sometimes irreversible.

It’s fascinating to discover that despite the particularly challenging conditions, the deep ocean supports abundant wildlife. At a depth of several hundred meters from our coast, you can find unique fishes and sharks that have learned to live in complete darkness and under the incredible pressure of the layers of water pressing down on them from above. To communicate in a lightless environment, most animals have learned to produce their own light, like fireflies on land. Some animals use sound and smell to communicate in the darkness. Nonetheless, those who live in the deep sea are almost completely dependent on what happens in the waters above them and on the particles of food that fall like snowflakes from the shallow sea far above.

Unique coral gardens

The most unique place in Israel’s deep sea is located approximately 30 km from Tel Aviv’s beaches, at depths of 500–1,200 meters. Here, there is a unique richness of rare coral gardens that usually live only in colder regions yet manage to survive in the relatively warm water of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. A unique underwater “forest” with a diversity of fishes, sharks, and crustaceans has formed around the corals.

This is one of our most vulnerable natural landscapes. Unrestricted fishing or the establishment of infrastructure for gas and oil drilling may destroy it. Therefore, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel is acting to establish the first-ever deep-sea marine reserve, to protect our unique assets that cannot be found anywhere else.

The site chosen for the first deep-sea nature reserve has a slightly strange name—the “Palmachim Disturbance”—because of its unusual structure that resembles a scar on the seabed. The Society for the Protection of nature in Israel has formulated a plan to map the region and identify which parts of it require complete protection and where further tests should be performed before deciding where to permit fishing or other activities.

It is important to understand that fishing with nets that spread down to the seabed can cause great damage to this sensitive environment and destroy the rare deep-sea coral gardens that have developed there. Fortunately, this fishing method is not common in Israel, but the lack of fishes in the shallow sea may encourage its implementation in the future—and this must be prevented.

Dangerous drilling

A threat that is already affecting Israel’s deep sea is gas and oil exploration and drilling, including laying pipes, building infrastructure, and actions with a real danger of creating fatal pollution. These actions may cause a significant and often irreversible impact on the sensitive, delicate environment of life on the deep sea bed.

After the greatest crude oil disaster in history, in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, it turned out that the damage had spread to great distances of dozens of kilometers and depths of hundreds of meters. In Israel, the Leviathan 2 drilling station has already leaked, and it took a full year to remedy the damage.

Absurdly, all decisions related to the deep sea, which is such an exquisite natural environment, depend on only one agency—the Ministry of Energy. This ministry deals mainly with economic interests and has no understanding or interest in protecting unique natural assets. Thus, one sole Petroleum Commissioner determines what happens in Israel’s entire deep sea, the size of which equals the country’s entire land area.

How can we place the fate of the deep-sea coral gardens, sharks, and stingrays in the hands of the Petroleum Commissioner? Does this sound logical to anyone?

Photos: Andrei Aharonov

Further Reading

What’s hiding in the deep sea—on the “Blue Half” website

Why it’s important to establish marine nature reserves

Endangered species in the Mediterranean Sea

Video: Get to know the Palmachim Disturbance

4. The State of the Campaign <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/830#current-state>

The State of the Campaign

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel demands an amendment to the law that determines what happens in our deep, expansive marine area—the Maritime Zones Law.

We must establish a committee similar to the planning committees responsible for all building done on land—to supervise what’s done in the sea. This is the only way to ensure that fateful decisions in the deep sea are fair and transparent to the public, and supervised by the Ministry for Environmental Protection.

Similarly, we must create a nature reserve to protect the treasures hidden in our deep sea. We must take into account not only the economic motives of gas and oil drilling—but also the protection of nature for ourselves and future generations.

More campaigns to protect the oceans

5. More Campaigns <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/830#more-posts>

Open Landscapes <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns>

**The Motorcycles Destroying Nature** [**https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/8792**](https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/8792)

This campaign is part of the campaigns:

Open Landscapes

The Story in 100 Words

The Campaign in Numbers

The Full Story

The State of the Campaign

Motorcycles Speeding in the South

Motorcycles in the South. Photo: Shutterstock

The Motorcycles Destroying Nature

1. The Story in 100 Words <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/8792#intro>

The Story in 100 Words

You’re probably familiar with the motorcycles and off-road vehicles that race over green hills and sand dunes. They scare hikers; impact wildlife and all the nature around them; and leave a trail of noise, dust, and damage that will be felt for a very long time, often for up to several years.

An off-road motorcycle race is planned to take place in early April in the southern Judean Desert and the Dead Sea. Part of the race may impact rare, unique wildlife, sensitive desert areas, and breathtaking landscapes. If this is not bad enough, the Ministry for Culture and Sport, headed by Minister Hili Tropper, supports and finances the race.

This time we are going to make a racket to prevent nature from harm!

2. The Campaign in Numbers <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/8792#small-fight-in-nums>

3. The Full Story <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/8792#sf-story>

**The Campaign to Protect Nature from Motorcyclists**

An off-road motorcycle race within the framework of the Hard Enduro World Championship is planned to take place soon in Israel. The race, named “Minus 400”, will take place on April 5–7 in one of the most unique natural landscapes in Israel: the hilly areas of the southern Judean Desert, from Arad to the Dead Sea.

“Combining Israel’s history and the Dead Sea region…the extreme contours of the desert region will determine who are the strongest, best, and most determined riders in the world”, wrote the race organizers.

**And that is the problem in a nutshell.**

The first two days of the race will take place on existing trails or other suitable places (“disturbed areas”). This is reasonable.

But on the third day of the race, approximately 200 riders will speed from Arad to the Dead Sea through natural landscapes, including extreme sections that may destroy river channels, hills, narrow ridges, and deep wadis. The riders, some of whom are expected to drop out during the race due to the difficult ride, will leave behind a trail of noise, smoke, pollution, and destruction.

**We must stop this!**

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel is collaborating with local activists from the Sustainable Desert organization in the campaign to prevent a severe impact on this sensitive desert landscape.

Dozens of scientists and archaeologists have joined the call to plan the event in such a way as to prevent harming nature. The Minister for Environmental Protection, Tamar Zandberg, approached the Minister of Culture and Sport, Hili Tropper—whose ministry supports the event—and wrote that “there is no justification for such significant damage to nature and environmental assets to run a motorcycle race, especially if there are alternatives”.

**Destroying the homes of unique wild animals and plants**

A shocking video shared by the race organizers (which was later removed from the internet at the request of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel and Sustainable Desert organization) compiled footage of motorcyclists riding with terrifying noise, speeding wildly, and destroying the environment within the unique landscapes of the Dead Sea. We cannot let this happen here.

The movement of off-road vehicles in natural landscapes erodes the upper soil layer and causes severe environmental damage. This driving causes noise that frightens and scares wild animals and it harms their habitats for many years to come. It destroys plants, birds’ nests, and small mammals.

Mad speeding by motorcyclists in desert landscapes is even worse since it generates an extreme, sudden change in an environment that naturally changes very slowly.

The motorcycle race could cause the death and destruction of plants and animals, accelerated soil erosion, changes in flowing water paths, and pollution due to leakage of fuel, oil, and scattered bits of metal. The great impact on the landscape may include damage to ancient roads with cultural and historical importance. The region is rich in archaeological sites and observation points that attract hikers from Israel and tourists from all over the world.

The Dead Sea and Southern Judean Desert landscape is home to unique, sensitive, and even rare wildlife and plants. They already face great threats due to the activity of quarries, factories, and of course, off-road vehicles.

This region, spanning from a height of 600 meters above sea level to 400 meters below sea level (the lowest point on the earth), hosts a particularly rich natural world with some of the most characteristic large mammals in Israel, such as the Nubian ibex, the striped hyena, and the grey wolf. This is also an important region for the Palestine mountain gazelle. Griffon vultures, Egyptian vultures, and golden eagles breed on the high cliffs. Some of the plants adapted to live in the desert are very rare and even endangered.

**Further reading**

Scientists warn of the dangers of the Minus 400 race in the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea

Dozens of archaeologists warn of damage to important sites

The Minister for Environmental Protection calls to change the route of the Minus 400 race

A detailed ecological report by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel on the expected damage resulting from the motorcycle race in the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea