

Israel's Marine Stakeholders: Difficulties, Interests and Synergies

Dr. Yael Teff-Seker

The state of Israel does not yet have a comprehensive marine plan nor a clear marine policy, especially for its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Recent natural gas findings in the Israeli Mediterranean Sea, as well as their economic and ecological repercussions, have raised awareness to the need for such a plan. Unique considerations to the Israeli marine space include the struggle for energy independence, security threats, dependency on marine shipping, extensive water desalination and the protection of cultural and natural marine values. These require particular attention and influence the agenda of marine planning.

A team of experts recruited by the *Technion - Israel Institute of Technology* - has begun constructing a marine plan for Israel (the *Israel Marine Plan* or IMP), in hopes that it will lead to the viable and sustainable development and management of marine natural resources for generations to come. Since the second half of 2014, a team appointed by the Israeli Ministry of Interior has begun a parallel effort. Both planning processes include stakeholder participation events and follow-ups. Using thematic analysis, we chose to examine the products of that participation in order to extract significant themes regarding the current situation and the desired output of the planning process, as they are perceived by major stakeholders.

When analyzed and taken as a whole, these observations can potentially paint a bigger picture for marine planners in Israel. Despite the fact that both initiatives hired academic experts and professional advisors to support their process, stakeholder insights could either provide reinforcement for the information given by these experts, or, in other cases, give an alternative perspective or additional data and information "from the field".