

## 'Extreme weather brewing on horizon'

**Ehud Zion Waldoks**

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Israel's positioning on the Mediterranean increases its susceptibility to the impacts of global warming, the Environmental Protection Ministry's Chief Scientist Yishayahu Baror said Monday.

International studies have predicted that the Mediterranean basin will be more severely affected than other parts of the globe by rising temperatures, he said.

Baror is one of a team of scientists which has recently completed an interim report predicting the effects of climate change on Israel and offering initial recommendations for tackling these.

The ministry's initial recommendations focus on strengthening water and energy economy through efficiency and prevention of contamination. Potential effects of climate change should be taken into account when deciding how to utilize Israel's coastline as well, the report said.

Baror said the report was the beginning of a national plan to respond to significant changes in living conditions brought about by climate change.

Water is likely to become scarcer, according to the report. By the century's end, it predicts, water from natural sources will have been reduced by a quarter.

While the number of rainy days has already dropped as a result of climate change, when it does rain it is much more likely to flood. Such flooding could cause serious damage to people and property in the future, Baror warned.

Moreover, freshwater sources would have a harder time recharging to their full potential, he said, a problem exacerbated by consistent over-pumping.

The Kinneret, renowned for its sweet waters, could become saltier as a result of climate change, Baror said. An additional concern is the potential threat of poisonous algae.

Average temperatures are set to rise nearly two degrees by 2020 and another three degrees by the end of the century, according to the report. They have already risen two degrees since the 1970s.

Baror also confirmed that summers have become hotter and heat waves longer. Climate change has also caused the month of July to become hotter than the month of August, he said.

Baror also noted that winters have become colder.

Energy demands were expected to rise three percent a year because of increased demands for air conditioners. he said.

Baror noted that the Mediterranean was rising at a rate of 10 cm per decade, which could lead to a loss of up to two kilometers of coastline every 10 years, but assured that most coastal cities were not in danger of sinking in the near future.

Port industries in Tel Aviv and Haifa were not under immediate or even long-term threat, he said, although there was a chance that a small part of Acre would be threatened by the rising sea.

The scientist also warned that extreme weather phenomena could occur more often in the Mediterranean as result of climate change.

Agriculture would be badly hit, primarily because of decreasing water supplies, Baror said.

Biological diversity could also be affected as species moved northward to escape the rising heat, according to the report.

Baror admitted that several hurdles must be overcome before a national plan to combat the effects of climate change could be formulated. The National Infrastructures Ministry had no plans in place to evaluate the problems that may arise from the impact of global warming on such basic necessities as water and electricity, he said.

Baror added that at least NIS 10m. a year was needed for research to "close knowledge gaps." Environmental Protection Minister Gideon Ezra admitted that "the government was not acting in the spirit of these recommendations."

While great strides had been made in recent years, "the ministries themselves need to provide a personal example by becoming more energy efficient and environmentally friendly," Ezra added.

Baror said Ezra had ordered an inter-ministerial committee established two weeks ago to formulate Israel's response to climate change. Ezra himself concluded on a somewhat more optimistic note, saying he expected that the country would be in a different place on this issue a decade from now.