



Warmer, more extreme: the climate crisis is a strategic threat to Israel

Temperatures will rise, rainfall will decline and extreme weather events will become more frequent and lead to extended heat waves – this is the content of the first report of the Climate Change Adaptation Administration. Nevertheless, the report presents a depressing picture of lack of funding for one of the greatest challenges humankind will face.

Ilana Korial, April 21, 2021, YNet

We have to acknowledge that the climate crisis is a national strategic threat – this is one of the assertions in the first report of the Climate Change Adaptation Administration. The cover of the report leaves no room for doubt regarding the dangers facing the earth, which the authors are warning about. The photo shows the planet earth going up in flames. The report was published in the week Earth Day 2021 was celebrated and discusses the threats to our planet as a result of climate change.

The Minister for Environmental Protection, Gila Gamliel, will present the report to the ministers of the new government to be established. The report summarizes the work done by the Climate Change Adaptation Administration during recent years and its conclusions, as well as recommendations for how Israel can continue to prepare for coping with climate change. The Administration, headed by Alon Zaks, senior deputy director for natural resources in the Ministry for Environmental Protection, was established by the July 2018 Government Decision No. 4079. There are 35 members in the administration that represent various bodies from all sectors of the Israeli economy, including government offices, local government, environmental organizations, representatives of the public and others. The first report published by the administration includes a number of recommendations, including acknowledging the climate

crisis as a national strategic threat, providing funding and tools for the administration and a five-year budget of 2.5 billion NIS for short-term implementation.

The report states that the climate crisis will have an intense effect on the Middle East.

According to the data from the Israel Meteorological Service and models developed by the Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research Institute, extensive changes are expected in our region. These include temperatures rising on average by about four degrees, precipitation decreasing by 10-20%, extreme weather events, such as extreme heat, increasing numbers of floods and rainstorms and as sea level rising by 4 mm annually. In 2020 for example, cities were flooded and people died, and in summer, we experienced record high temperatures in lengthy heat waves. The Administration is stating the obvious: climate is changing; it is becoming warmer, drier, higher and more extreme.

Warmer: The average temperature in Israel rose by about 1.4 degrees, from 1950 to 2017, and is expected to continue rising by about another degree the end of 2050, and by about four degrees by the end of the century.

Drier: In recent decades, there is a decreasing trend in the number of rainy days. This trend is expected to continue according to climate models. Precipitation is expected to decrease on average by 10% to 20% by the end of the century (2017-2100), relative to the period between 1988 and 2017.

More extreme: Extreme weather events will be more frequent and trigger extended heat waves, a rise in the number of peak precipitation events, modifications in rainfall distribution and changes in the frequency, duration and intensity of precipitation events. There is a probability of longer dry seasons, droughts, urban heat islands, fires and streams drying up, and, on the other hand short storms leading to flash floods, soil erosion and flooding, throughout the country, and in cities in particular.

Higher: Changes in temperature, salinity and sea levels are expected in the Mediterranean sea. During the past 40 years, observations indicate increasing temperature trends (about 0.13°C annually) and salinity of the upper water mass. The rise in sea level is expected to modify the coastline and narrow the beaches at the foot of the coastal cliff and to continue destroying the

coastal cliff and changing the beach profile. The rising sea level will also increase the duration of flooding of shallow coastal areas and the penetration of seawater to the coastal stream estuaries. Another effect of the rising sea level is the salinization of the coastal aquifer.

The administration includes several committees, including the local government committee and the energy, technology and infrastructure sub-committee. Despite its importance, the administration is not funded, and its members met only a few times. The committees' achievements were limited. Among others, the local government sub-committee presented a manual for preparing for climate change and sustainable energy. However, in fact, local government has been left to cope with climate change on its own, with the strong local governments having the upper hand.

The report includes eight recommendations, primarily acknowledging that climate change is a national strategic threat. The report states, "This strategy must be translated into policy, legislation, funding and implementation in the field". The administration also recommended supporting local government in planning preparedness plans for climate change and supporting funding for programs for the entire local government sector. It also recommended conducting a macro-economic assessment of the impacts of climate change and assessment of risks to Israel's economy.

These recommendations come at a time when Israel is still investing in polluting fuels and is not doing enough, according to environmental organizations and scientists, to reduce its dependence on these fuels. Moreover, one of the main polluting agents, transportation, is in crisis and citizens have to rely on polluting private vehicles instead of efficient public transportation.

The administration recommends funding projects to the extent of 2.5 billion NIS. Some of the projects are essential, such as establishing a national climate computation center, preparing a national plan for river rehabilitation, formulating an action plan for coping with extreme climate events, supporting local government activity to shade public spaces and plant trees to the extent of 1 billion NIS and more. Others include a public campaign (20 million NIS) and preparing a curriculum focusing on climate for Israel's educational system (5 million NIS).

Nevertheless, there seems to be a lack of preparedness regarding climate-adapted agriculture. It is obvious that no comprehensive economic work has been done in the administration. The Minister for Environmental Protection, Gila Gamliel, said: "The covid-19 crisis highlight the understanding that the State of Israel must prepare immediately to reduce the effects of climate change and to find solutions for all the significant issues it is facing – environmental, ecological, health and economic. The government has to acknowledge that climate change is a national strategic threat. This is the time for bold decisions".