

# MARITIME STRATEGIC EVALUATION FOR ISRAEL 2017/18

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## "The Sea Trail" – Connecting Israeli Public to the Sea

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### Why the Sea Trail and why along the coast?

In recent years, and in particular following the major offshore natural gas discoveries, there has been increasing public interest in "Israel's maritime domain", a huge area of 27,000 square kilometers. It is about 30 percent larger than the State's territory on dry land and stretches up to 165 kilometers westward from Israel's shores. In this domain is an immense potential for the development of Israeli society and Israel's economy, including the supply of natural gas and energy, the vast majority of Israel's exports and imports, the desalinization of seawater, fishing and marine agriculture, heritage sites and also a variety of leisure, sport and recreational activities.

These economic activities put the delicate balance of the marine and coastal environment at risk. This includes the pollution of the sea from various activities both on land and in the sea, the penetrations of invasive species of plants and animals that alter the ecological balance, uncontrolled fishing, development projects and real estate pressure on the coast and other activities, such as defense, tourism and marine sports, which constitute environmental threats that are often not recognized by the public. Therefore, making the maritime domain—which is usually out of sight—more accessible to discourse and public awareness is of great importance. There is no replacement for physical access and visiting the coast itself "by way of one's feet" in order to understand, feel and participate in the public discourse on the marine environment in Israel.

In recent years, as interest has grown in hiking, the hiking trails in Israel and the world have become a basis for the development of a culture of leisure and recreation, an infrastructure for the creation of public awareness of the need for environmental protection and an important platform for the development of tourism. With the development of tourism, sport and physical activity in the outdoors, there has been growing demand for the development of hiking trails, for both short hikes and trekking.

Also in Israel the culture of hiking and marked hiking trails has developed into a major extent. There are hundreds of marked trails, with a total length of more than 10,000 kilometers all over the country. These include short hiking trails of the Society for the Protection of Nature, longer trails such as the Israel Trail, the Kinneret Trail and the cross-Golan trail, as well as local trails created by the Keren Kayemet, the Ministry of Tourism and many local authorities.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Israel take part in hikes in numerous frameworks: youth movements, schools, hiking clubs for various age groups and sectors, and also family and individual hiking. The need to discover parts of the country that can be reached (almost) only by foot, the growing awareness to the values of nature preservation and the

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curiosity of the hiking public are the main factors behind the development of the hiking culture in Israel and the world.

The idea of creating a national Sea Trail in Israel is founded on these two contemporary trends in Israeli society: the increasing attraction of the public to the trails in Israel and the world and to leisure and recreational activity on Israel's shores; and the increasing public interest in the sea, particularly following the discovery of natural gas in Israel's maritime domain, but also the fear of environmental threats that are the result of development and economic initiatives in the sea and on its shores.

The goal of developing the Sea Trail is also to meet Israeli society's need for a connection to the sea, the need to strengthen maritime cultural identity and the need to increase the public's exposure to the sea and deepen its knowledge of the sea. The Sea Trail will serve as a platform for increasing the public's awareness of its right to free access to the coast and to hike uninterrupted along the shore and it will also assist in public protection of Israel's beaches which are subject to economic and real estate pressures.

The Sea Trail project is also consistent with two strategic documents whose goal is to propose a national policy to improve the values and methods for managing Israel's maritime domain: *The Israel Maritime Plan* which was created by the Faculty for Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion during the years 2015-17 and *Policy Document for Israel's Maritime Domain* which is currently being written by the Planning Authority of the Ministry of Finance. Prominent within the spirit and approach of these two documents are the principles of integrative and sustainable management, as well as principles related to the involvement of the public in planning and decision-making processes and the right of the public to physical, economic and cultural access to the sea and its shores.

### **What is the Sea Trail initiative?**

The Sea Trail is a new environmental-social project for the creation of a continuous national hiking trail about 240 kilometers in length which will stick as closely as possible the Mediterranean shoreline of the State of Israel, from Rosh Hanikra in the North to the Zikim beach on the border with the Gaza Strip in the South. The trail will be branded and marked as a guided hiking trail, which will run as close as possible to the shoreline, with necessary detours in a number of locations and stops at places of interest which will direct the eye, the mind and heart towards the expanse of the sea. The hiker on the Sea Trail will also benefit from guidebooks, maps and a navigation app, which will provide information in real time, as well as an Internet site, all of which will enrich the hiking experience along the marked trail. At the same time, the trail will encourage and develop not only a hiking culture but also a culture of marine sports – diving, snorkeling, kayaking, sailing and other types of sport and recreation activity, which will be supported and promoted by the Sea Trail.

The idea of developing a trail along Israel's coast is not a new one. Outdoorsmen from the Nature and Parks Authority and from the Antiquities Authority, as well as hiking enthusiasts, already came up with the idea in the past, but for various reasons it did not come to fruition. The vision and dream of the creators of the trail today to create a national trail that will make the sea and its shores and the marine environment, culture and heritage accessible to all Israelis and will contribute to deepening the Israeli public's feeling of ownership and responsibility for the sea and its shores. The Sea Trail will also contribute to the welfare of Israel's citizens in a hands-on, recreational and educational manner, with emphasis on getting to know the Israel's shores and its maritime domain and the preservation of its nature and heritage.

The Sea Trail is not aimed only at hiking enthusiasts and lovers of the sea. The Sea Trail has a major potential to become a focus of attraction also for foreign tourists, since high-quality hiking trails attract tourists looking for experiences and adventure and who want to be self-reliant, and at a later stage classical tourists will take an interest as well. Evidence of this is the economic and tourism success of the various coastal trails in Spain, Portugal, Britain, France and the US.

### **An initiative by citizens that later attracted the public sector**

The project began to take shape during 2016 as an initiative by citizens who volunteered their time and worked without any organized institutional framework. The initial years of planning were funded mainly by a private philanthropic fund and currently the establishment of the Sea Trail is under the auspices of Haifa University. There is also an effort to recruit public and government bodies who expressed interest in the project, such as the Society for the Protection of Nature, the Nature and Parks Authority, the Ecocean Association, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Tourism and other municipal, civic and government bodies who promised their support of this national project. The Sea Trail project will take several years since it requires complicated coordination and cooperation between government bodies, civic non-profit organizations and numerous local authorities.

### **The Goals of the Sea Trail**

1. To create access to the sea and its shores for the entire population and the strengthening of the feeling of public ownership of the sea's resources for the benefit of Israel's citizen, in an experiential, recreational and educational manner.
2. The strengthening of public awareness, knowledge, interest and feeling of responsibility for Israel's maritime domain, with emphasis on the preservation of its environment, nature and heritage.
3. Creation of a continuous national trail as a guided hiking path, which will pass through the jurisdiction of numerous municipalities and government authorities. The

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trail will be established by means of genuine partnership and responsibility, while maintaining a coastal continuum and a feeling of belonging to the Sea Trail brand.

### Guiding principles

1. The fundamental values of the Sea Trail are preservation of the environment, safety of hikers and a maintaining a coastal continuum.
2. The use of existing infrastructure – by connecting existing coastal trails and urban boardwalks and promenade; there will be almost no need for new routes or development of paths beyond what already exists.
3. Creation of a minimalistic trail and signage in order to minimize the effect on the environment.
4. Proximity to the sea to whatever extent possible and creation of interesting and safe detours in areas where the shoreline is not accessible.
5. Providing information to hikers by means of an Internet site, guidance booklets, maps and a navigation and information app and the exploitation of these media in order to direct the mind and the heart westward, to the sea.
6. The trail will be used as an infrastructure for the creation of public and social awareness of the right of free access to the coast and the protection of the environment.
7. The trail will also serve as a platform for educational, environmental and cultural activities, including the involvement of education systems on various levels. At a later stage, it will be possible to organize educational and informational activities along the course of the trail, such as cleaning of the beaches, sponsorship of segments of the coast, etc.
8. Marking of the trail using the familiar and successful language of trail marking according to the tradition of the longer trails and making use of previous knowledge and experience.
9. Prohibition of motorized access and at the same providing access to as much of the population as possible and to the handicapped. The trail will be designated for hikers only and not for cyclists.
10. The involvement of coastal communities in order to maximize their fruits and benefits from the trail.
11. Creation of partnerships with the local authorities, government ministries, government authorities, NGOs, research bodies and academia.
12. Target populations: domestic and foreign tourism, recreational walkers, hiking groups, schools, youth movements, families, individuals and residents who live nearby; athletes, runners, and audiences for special events.

The trail will become part of a national and global system of trails.



### **The Sea Trail project is being carried out according to three main stages:**

Stage I – 2016-17 – Planning and characterization of the trail together with the formulation of planning concepts and principles; detailed planning of the pilot segment in the area of the Carmel coast; identification and initial contacts with potential partners; preparation of a booklet summarizing the first year of the project.

Stage II – to be carried out in 2017-18 – formulation of a consortium of partner organizations for the implementation of the project; fundraising for the creation and development of the

trail through Haifa University and also with the assistance of philanthropic organizations, foundations and private donors in Israel and abroad, the implementation of a pilot on the Carmel coast and creation of an Internet site and navigation app.

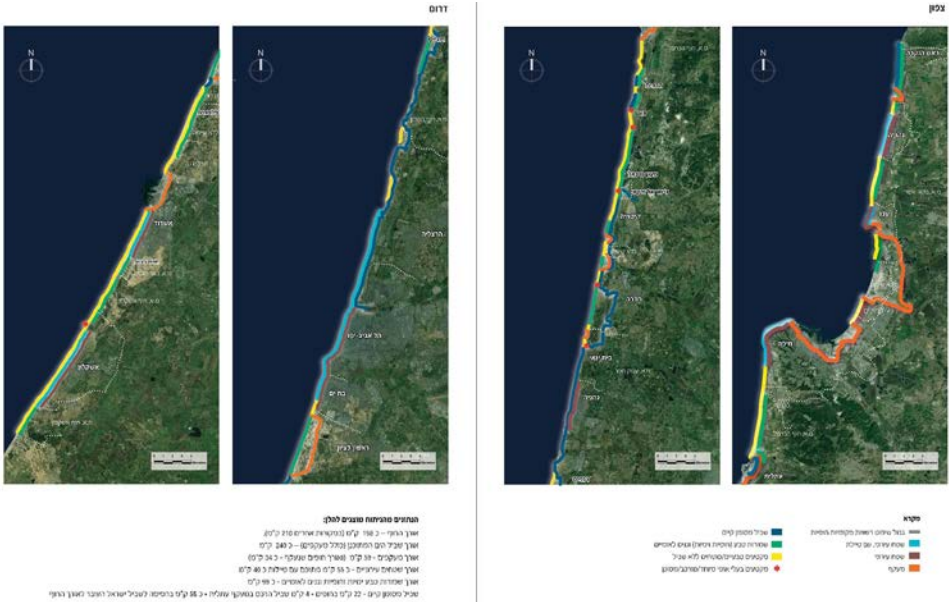
Stage III – Preparation, planning and implementation of the rest of the trail, from Rosh Hanikra to the Zikim beach (will take about 4 years).

### **The Advisory Public Committee**

In view of the complex challenges facing the trail, which include cooperation between numerous statutory bodies and the challenges of creating the trail according to principles of environmental protection, safety and the many values embodied by the trail, it was decided by the initiators to create the "Advisory Public Committee for the Sea Trail". The function of the committee is to advise and guide the Sea Trail activists and its future administration and to exploit the experience and contacts of the committee members in order to promote the project. The members of the committee are senior public figures who are active both on the institutional level and represent all of the bodies and organizations relevant to the creation of the trail and also as personal experts and advisors to the project. The committee does not have any statutory status and its activity is based on the good will of its members. The committee, all of whose members fulfil their function on a volunteer basis meet twice annually and it will support the project throughout the period it is being implemented.

### **Main achievements of the Sea Trail workgroup at the end of the first work year and the current status of the project**

- A planning structure has been created, as well as an infrastructure for public awareness of the creation of the Sea Trail.
- Conceptual/architectural planning has been completed and the planning principles for the trail have been formulated.
- Statutory and legal aspects of the routing of the trail in various areas have been examined.
- Broad support has been obtained for the project among government bodies, organizations, public non-profit organizations and also many private individuals.
- Planning of an exact route for the pilot project in the Carmel coast area has been completed.
- Possibilities for raising funds from partner organizations and from the business community have been looked at, as well as the possibility of dedication and memorialization of segments of the trail or of the rest and information stops; some of the potential partners have promised financial donation or in-kind donations.
- Foundations in Israel and abroad have been identified and in the future funding proposals will be submitted to them.



Characterization maps of coastal sections

- The community and the public were brought into the planning and implementation stages with emphasis on coastal communities (in the pilot area of the Carmel coast). In this context, collaboration will be developed with educational bodies and institutions and civic non-profits, and special attention will be given to the town of Jisr az-Zarqa.
- Ways have been examined of increasing public awareness and branding of the Sea Trail by means of public relations and marketing activity.
- The relationship with Haifa University was bore fruit with regard to its willingness, as a large and significant public body, to adopt and promote the Sea Trail project.
- There are ongoing contacts with additional bodies to recruit them as partners in the consortium for the creation and operation of the Sea Trail; for many of these organizations, the vision of the trail, its creation and its operation are consistent with their fundamental values and goals. As part of their connection or partnership with the Sea Trail, the potential has been created for the future use of the Sea Trail platform to convey and implement the educational, social and environmental messages of these bodies.
- Comprehensive and in-depth marketing material on the Sea Trail has been produced and in particular a 60-page high-quality booklet that describes and analyzes the project.



## Where is the project headed?

After the private philanthropic fund approved its continued support for the work on the Sea Trail, which is being carried out under the auspices of Haifa University, activity during 2017-18 will concentrate on consolidating the consortium of partners for the creation and development of the project; on fundraising by way of Haifa University, donor bodies, foundations and donors in Israel and abroad; on the implementation of the pilot on the Carmel coast; and on the establishment of the Internet site, the production of PR and guidance material and a navigation and information app.

It is the intention to complete the pilot project in the Carmel coast area and then to gradually develop the Sea Trail, apparently from North to South, and also according to the willingness and ability of the local authorities to collaborate with the project and to become involved in opening the national trail as soon as possible.

**We hope that within two to three years the residents of Israel and tourists, lovers of the sea and hiking enthusiasts will be able to walk uninterrupted or at least in segments on most of the route from Rosh Hanikra to Zikim beach.**

