**Israel and Jordan Agree to Share Water, But Fall Short of Saving Dead Sea**

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A long-awaited agreement to supply fresh water to Jordan and Israel, and to transport water to the drying Dead Sea, was reached on Thursday in Jordan. The $900 million agreement includes the building of a desalination plant in Jordan that will supply water to southern Jordan and Israel. In return Israel will sell more water to Jordan. The agreement also calls for the desalination brine (salt) runoff to be dumped back into the Dead Sea.

**A Centuries-Old Dead Sea Proposal**

The draining of the Dead Sea has been a negative result of Middle East politics. Since the 1960s, the Dead Sea has been shrinking at a rate of 3.2 feet per year. This is a direct result of the irrigation and water storage practices of Israel, Jordan and Syria. It is believed that the Dead Sea could dry up completely by 2050.

In December 2013, representatives from Israel, Palestine and Jordan came together in an unusual show of cooperation and signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a smaller project to slow down the drying of the Dead Sea and provide more fresh water for the three countries. This is a scaled back version of an original proposed project-“Red-Dead” pipeline. This may signal that the work to address the issues may be decades away.

**Environmental and Economic Hurdles**

Once the terms of reference for the original 2 billion cubic meter per year project were established in 2005, the three involved parties sent a letter to the World Bank asking for assistance in securing donor financing and overseeing a feasibility study. In 2012, the World Bank released a Feasibility Study, an Environmental and Social Assessment (ESA) study, and a Study of Alternatives on the project.

The results of that study made it clear that there were two huge problems. The first was that the project was going to cost on the order of $10 billion dollars. The second was that scientific modeling showed that discharging too much brine into the Dead Sea could have drastic consequences for the ecology and appearance of the body of water. A mix of brine and seawater would still be relatively fresh compared to the Dead Sea, and could result in stratification, or layering of water of varying salinities due to differing densities.

Based on cost and unclear consequences for the Dead Sea, it was eventually decided that the Red-Dead pipeline would proceed as a pilot study. Gidon Bromberg, the Israeli Director of EcoPeace, thinks that although the real Red-Dead pipeline will never occur, the countries would hate to waste good political capital.