

6. Water policy positions do not split along party lines but rather along user lines: agriculture vs. other users. Agriculture uses by far the most water; other users represent a small percentage of use. Productive uses of water (industry, hotels, resorts) enjoy subsidies similar to those enjoyed by agriculture. It is domestic users who pay full fare. It is true that the agricultural sector has stronger influence in Labor than in Likud, but this is not reflected by any significant difference in policy between the two, and the smaller parties follow the major parties' lead on water. The settler groups in the territories, although right-wing, favor agriculture's position on water.

Virtually all users now buy water from the water authority. Because of increasing salt and nitrate pollution, fewer and fewer municipalities are able to operate their own wells and must buy from Mekorot. Local authorities (municipalities, etc.) have organized on a national basis into a Center for Local Governments. They propose their own water projects and bargain collectively with the water authority and the government on major issues involving water rights.

7. The Water Commissioner has no authority or mandate in the territories, only inside the Green Line. The water commission will sometimes serve as a consulting advisor to the military government/civilian administration to review water supplies, but only on invitation.

The legal water situation differs between the West Bank and Gaza.

In the West Bank, there was a pre-occupation Jordanian water law that vested authority in the deputy prime minister to license water use. A member of the civilian administration is designated to exercise that function under the Jordanian law.

In Gaza, there had been no water law under Egyptian rule. Since the Gaza aquifer was even then heavily overpumped, the civilian administration has adopted its own regulations.

Water pricing in the territories is according to cost. Israel offers no subsidy, although he does not know whether any subsidy comes from Jordan. For the settlements, Mekorot buys water from the local authorities at cost; he does not know whether Mekorot sells to the settlers at a subsidized price.

There have been a few projects to transfer water from Israel to the territories, and some wells sunk to utilize more water from aquifers that would otherwise flow to the Dead Sea. Regarding reclaimed sewage water from Jerusalem: what flows west is all used, what goes east is only partly used.

4. Towns pay almost the full cost of water. Agriculture and other "productive uses" get subsidy. There has been much recent discussion about water subsidies. YK says the Water Commission will not remove the subsidies, but will try to reassess them to make them more proportionate to the cost.

It is generally felt that major projects costs should not be passed on to users. This applies to most agricultural infrastructure. However, in towns the smaller projects do have costs passed on to rate-payers. For this, smaller towns need help; a special fund has been created by adding a small amount to the rates to help out smaller towns (pop. less than 40,000).

Regarding wastage, about 13% of urban-domestic use is "unaccounted for." This is by international standards (advanced countries consider 10% a very good figure), but more than Israel can afford. They are trying to deal with this; it is feasible because only ten towns account for half of the waste.

By changing habits (e.g., using less water to flush toilets) they could save an estimated 30-40 Mcm/year.

Talks and planning is ongoing between the Water Commissioner and Agricultural planners. Look at forecasts for population growth, and it's a zero-sum game; as domestic requirements increase, agricultural use must decrease. The whole structure of agriculture is changing toward more intensive uses that require less water. Cotton is the first crop to be affected -- last year, only half the area compared to previous years.

5. Discussion about moving the Water Commission to another ministry and out of agriculture. The Commissioner opposes this because of his political affiliations. Hence no likelihood of a move in the near future. Debate will continue at a low level, it is not currently an intensive issue.

Knesset Water Committee. He is not sure what its relationship is even though he has testified before it many times.

Water Drilling Control Law. This applies only in Israel, not in the territories. The West Bank uses Jordanian law.

Re water in territories: Zeev Golani, now with Tahal, was in charge.