



# The evolution of coastal management policy in the state of Israel

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## Abstract

This article reviews and evaluates the evolution of coastal management policy in Israel since 1948. It is argued that a sectoral approach to coastal management, based on the land use planning system, has proved to be of limited effectiveness. An upsurge of political interest in coastal management, evident in Israel since the late-1990s, is explained, and associated policy proposals evaluated. It is concluded that while significant challenges remain, Israel has an opportunity to take a decisive step towards a more effective coastal management policy framework. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

For coastal nations, integrated coastal management (ICM) is considered a key element in the pursuit of national development goals, particularly within the context of the transition to sustainability [1–3]. However, the triggers and mechanisms leading to the adoption of an ICM programme at a national level have been subject to debate. Attempts to develop a generic model of the ICM process generally consist of a stepwise evolution from issue identification to the formulation, implementation and monitoring of a management process [3–5]. Progression between stages within the models, especially between strategy planning and “live” management stages are thought to be reliant upon securing sufficient “political will” [6]. In this context, political will is a prerequisite to unlock the resources to empower an ICM process. It has been suggested that a lack of political will may account for the observed gap between high level political and planning mechanisms, which inhibits the integration of ICM into national development planning [7].

The state of Israel has exhibited such a gap since it declared statehood in 1948, although at present the gap appears to be closing. This article examines the evolution

of coastal management policy in the state of Israel over the last half-century, in order to identify and evaluate contributory factors to the development of ICM. Particular emphasis is placed on Israel’s Mediterranean coast reflecting its status as Israel’s most extensive and economically significant coastal area. The article begins by introducing the national context, followed by a review of the major components of Israel’s coastal management framework. The framework is then evaluated through the analysis of two thematic case studies; with recent policy recommendations and institutional proposals also considered. Finally, the evolution of coastal policy is related to internal and external influences which are considered to have contributed to the development of political will in Israel for ICM.

## 2. National context

### 2.1. *The Arab–Israeli conflict*

Any discussion of Israel requires an understanding of its geo-political context. Indeed, a review of Israel’s brief history cannot fail to highlight complex religious, cultural and social undercurrents running through politics and society. Prior to 1948, the area now known as Israel lay within the borders of Palestine. Following Allied occupation during the First World War, Palestine was administered by Britain under a mandate granted by the

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League of Nations in 1922. Palestine's society at this time was a mix of Jews and Arabs. Nationalist aspirations held by both Jews and Arabs provoked inter-societal tension, which was exacerbated by mutual dissatisfaction with the mandate arrangement. Despite these pressures, the mandate persisted throughout the inter-war period and the Second World War. The Second World War, however, ultimately made British policy towards Palestine untenable for the following reasons: (1) the mandate was proving too costly given the priority of post-war reconstruction and the decline of the British Empire; (2) the United States adopted a post-war policy of supporting the call for a Jewish state; (3) the Holocaust led to international support for the Zionist view that Jews needed a state of their own to guarantee their security; (4) large numbers of Jews displaced by the war were arriving in Palestine; and (5) by 1947 there was virtual civil war between Jews and Arabs and considerable hostility towards the British [8]. British withdrawal from Palestine was facilitated by the United Nations (UN) through the development of a plan to partition Palestine into discrete Jewish and Arab areas,<sup>1</sup> with Jerusalem remaining under international administration. Although the partition plan was intended to satisfy the nationalist aspirations of both Jews and Arabs, contentious land allocation by the UN meant that in practice, both communities were dissatisfied and the situation moved inexorably towards armed conflict.

Israel declared statehood on 14 May 1948 as the areas allocated to the Jewish people under the UN partition plan. Immediately following this declaration, Israel was attacked by an Arab coalition of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, in order to "liberate Palestine" [8]. The ensuing Arab–Israeli War of 1948 ended with Israel occupying all land allocated to Jews and Arabs under the UN partition plan, as well as limited territory of neighbouring states. These regional land claims and underlying religious differences have subsequently formed the central focus of what is commonly known as the "Arab–Israeli Conflict". The conflict can be characterised by ongoing military exchanges which have created regional political instability. Peace treaties between Israel and Egypt (1979), and with Jordan (1994), have eased regional tension. However ongoing disputes over Palestinian Arab autonomy and national border disputes with Lebanon and Syria remain critical political issues that dominate national priorities. Thus, national security remains of key significance. This is the geo-political context in which ICM policy in Israel has evolved.

<sup>1</sup> The partition plan was developed over the summer of 1947 by the United Nations Special Committee for Palestine (UNSCOP). Despite accusations of bias, UNSCOP considered Jewish and Arab claims equally valid. The partition plan was approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 25 November 1947, although the United Kingdom and Arab members voted against the plan.

## 2.2. The Mediterranean coast

Israel's Mediterranean coast extends 188 km from the Egyptian border in the South to the Lebanese border in the north (Fig. 1). For 150 km north of the Egyptian border, the coast forms a smooth curve that gradually changes in orientation from NE–SW in the south to N–S in the north. Haifa Bay, formed by the Mount Carmel promontory, represents Israel's only natural harbour. The coastline to the south of Haifa Bay is characterised by sandy beaches up to 50 m in width, backed by low cliffs of up to 40 m in height. The entire Israeli coastline from the southern border to Acre (Akko) in the north, lies within the Nile Delta sediment cell. Sand migrates by longshore transport from the Nile delta eastwards across

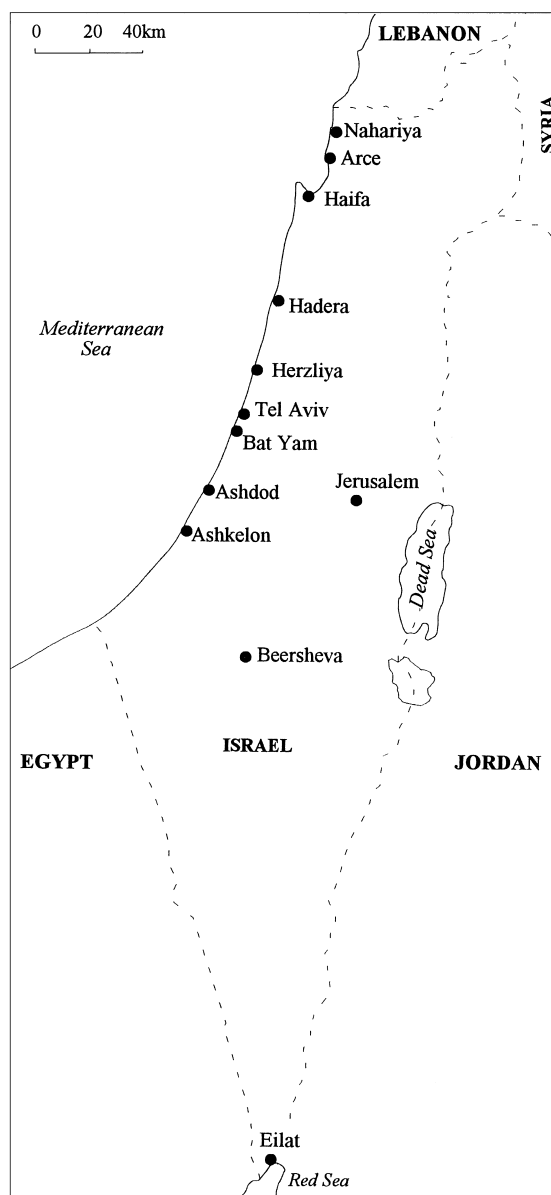


Fig. 1. Israel's political boundaries and major settlements.

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