

NEW DESAL MARKETS

First desalination plant in Jordan sparks off hopes for new water options

The commissioning of the first seawater desal facility in Jordan has created a wave of new interest in the concept. The success of further installations could rest on a relaxing in attitudes from the government.

The project developer behind Jordan's first seawater desalination plant has said the newly commissioned facility proves that desal has a significant role to play in the kingdom's future.

At the end of March, Jordanian firm AquaTreat commissioned the 15,000m³/d Aqaba desalination plant, which supplies water to industrial and municipal water users in the area around the southern city. The facility – procured on a seven-year build-operate-transfer basis – supplies water to two off-takers: utility Aqaba Water Company (AWC), and Arab Fertilizers and Chemicals Industries Ltd. (Kemapco), with water supply in a ratio of approximately 2:1.

The plant is located at the southern end of Jordan's 12-mile stretch of coastline, near to the Saudi border, and is situated on land owned by the Kemapco facility that it supplies. While the Aqaba Water Company is the mandated monopoly supplier of water to municipal, commercial and industrial water users in the region, it agreed a deal where Kemapco could buy water directly from the AquaTreat facility (at a price lower than AWC's industrial tariff) in exchange for supplying the land used for the plant.

While the price of water from the facility has not been officially confirmed, it is believed to be just under \$1.00/m³.

The full commissioning of the facility will also make Aqaba essentially independent of water supplied from the nearby Disi aquifer. This will free up supplies from Disi to be transported to the capital, Amman, and other northern parts of the country that have come under extreme water stress as a result of the influx of refugees from Iraq and Syria.

AquaTreat CEO Tarek Dehays told GWI that the successful opening of the plant – overseen by Jordanian prime minister Hani Mulki – had stimulated a lot of interest from other potential users of desalination technology. He added that an expansion of the new plant could be on the cards depending on demand growth in the city. He cautioned, however, that the geography and the regulatory structure around Aqaba would be a hurdle to any extended use of

JORDAN'S FIRST SEAWATER DESALINATION PLANT

AquaTreat's new Aqaba desalination facility was borne out of a canny muni-industrial deal cut in the southern coastal city. Further deployment of desal technology is likely to require a similar give-and-take.



Source: AquaTreat

seawater desalination in Jordan.

“The problem in Aqaba is that the population of the city is relatively small and the coastline is only short, [so] the options for desalination are limited. How-

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AquaTreat CEO Tarek Dehays

ever, lately there has been a lot of investment in Aqaba on both the industrial and the touristic side,” he told GWI. “We have been approached regarding the possibility of BOTs or partnerships. That said, the

government, because it has a monopoly, is aware of the possibility of losing that monopoly if people are taking their water from a private resource.”

Another factor complicating the situation is that AWC is the financially best-performing of Jordan's notoriously subsidy-heavy water utility companies.

The other elephant in the room is the development of the massive Red Sea-Dead Sea desalination and water transfer programme, which is due to draw and desalinate seawater from the Aqaba area before transporting mixed brine and raw water north to refill the shrinking Dead Sea.

While RFPs are expected to be sent to the five pre-qualified groups within the next two months, the long procurement lead-up could mean opportunities for further plants in Aqaba in the meantime, Dehays said. ■