



# What's New ?

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## Australian Governor-General Major-General Michael Jeffrey, visits Bahan Water Reservoir

"Thanks to KKL-JNF's efforts, Israel is recognized as a worldwide expert on wastewater reclamation."

On Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> May, the Governor General of Australia, **Major General Michael Jeffrey**, visited the Bahan water reservoir in Emek Hefer, which was built with the help of friends of KKL-JNF Australia. In his address, he remarked that he and his wife Marlene were both enjoying, and also very moved by, their visit to Israel: "We were at the Yad



From left: Robert Schneider, Maj-Gen Michael Jeffrey, Mrs. Jeffrey and Efi Stenzler

Vashem Holocaust Museum yesterday, and it brought back my boyhood memories of the horrors of war. We must ensure that democracies stay strong to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again.



"I feel a strong affinity with Israel. Yesterday we dedicated the Park for the Australian Soldier in Beersheba, which commemorates the charge of the Australian Light Horsemen during the First World War. As I am very interested in water technologies, I am very impressed by what KKL-JNF has accomplished here. Thanks to KKL-JNF's efforts, Israel is recognized as a worldwide expert on wastewater

reclamation. The scale here at the Bahan reservoir is remarkable.

“As nations, we must learn to cope with climate change as a result of global warming. I believe that water and food production will be the number one global challenge in the coming years. We hope to learn from your experience. Cooperation between nations on water is not just bilateral, but multilateral. The KKL-JNF scheme is visionary and makes a singular contribution towards global environmental awareness and action. I would like to especially commend KKL-JNF for its mission of providing water for Israel.”

**Efi Stenzler**, KKL-JNF World Chairman, greeted the Governor General, thanked him for his visit and described the ties between the peoples of Australia and Israel: “On my way here, I noticed many eucalyptus trees, which have become an integral part of Israel’s landscape. Israel’s first pioneers planted these Australian trees to help drain the marshes, and they were also planted on the banks of the Alexander stream, which is now restored thanks to the nearby wastewater purification plant. Although Australia is huge and Israel is small, we share many challenges. Significant parts of both our countries are covered by deserts, and we both face a water shortage. We are both engaged in a constant search for new technologies to help alleviate this crisis. I would identify three areas in which Israel is a leader in water technology – drip irrigation, desalination, and wastewater purification, as we see here at Bahan reservoir, which was built with the help of KKL-JNF Australia and KKL-JNF America.



“The connection between KKL-JNF and Australia has deep roots. In the 1990’s, the Hamadia and Shlomi reservoirs in the north were built with the help of KKL-JNF Australia. At present, KKL-JNF Australia is helping to finance four new reservoirs in the Bnei Shimon region of the northern Negev, which will increase the area’s agricultural potential and provide sources of employment for local residents. These projects and others are an expression of the deep friendship between the people and governments of Australia and Israel. Bahan reservoir is one of over two hundred reservoirs built by KKL-JNF throughout the country. It is an incredible achievement – one third of Israel’s agricultural needs are met by water from these reservoirs!

“Without the Bahan reservoir, sewage pollutes the Alexander River and the local aquifer. Ecological problems bring out the importance of cooperation between peoples. The Emek Hefer purification plant treats effluents from the Palestinian cities

of Nablus and Tulkarm. It is a symbolic olive branch of the peace that we long to realize with our Palestinian neighbors.”

Thursday was also Holocaust Remembrance Day, and the ceremony at Bahan reservoir ceased for two minutes of silence as the siren commemorating the murder of six million Jews sounded all over Israel. **Shalom Norman**, former KKL-JNF emissary in Australia, spoke about the history of the region and connected it to Holocaust Remembrance Day: “The lands of Emek Hefer were purchased by KKL-JNF between the years 1929 - 1934, the second largest land purchase in Israel’s history. It was a crucial move, although not entirely appreciated at the time. The land was being sold at a public auction, which was held on Saturday, to prevent the Jews from participating, since Saturday is the Jewish day of rest. Yehoshua Hankin, who was responsible for buying the land, went to Rabbi Kook, who was then the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, to ask him whether he could violate Jewish law by attending the auction. Rabbi Kook told him that not only was it permissible for him to participate in the auction on Saturday, but he was also allowed to sign the deed in order to redeem the ancient Jewish homeland. After the purchase was completed, Emek Hefer was settled by the first Jewish refugees from Hitler’s Germany, after his rise to power in 1933. During the War of Independence, the strategic importance of this region became only too clear. Although the distance between the Mediterranean Sea and the Green Line is only fourteen kilometers at this spot, it provides a corridor to northern Israel, which would have been lost during the war if not for the Jewish settlements here. The water provided by the Bahan reservoir allows the visionary project that began then to continue today.”



**Amos Brandeis**, manager and chief planner of the Alexander River restoration project, described a personal connection between Holocaust Remembrance Day and the ceremony: “Sixty nine years ago, two girls were playing in Berlin. One of these girls was my mother, who fled to Argentina and later immigrated to Israel. The other girl was Kathy Cohen, who fled to Australia where she resides to this day. Despite geographical distance, the two women remained close

friends, and I personally have visited Australia many times. Both Australia and Israel are immigrant societies, and despite the difference in size, face many similar challenges. Everything in Israel is small, except for its problems! The Bahan water reservoir was, until two years ago when KKL-JNF built another, the largest reservoir

in the north, the largest recycled sewage water reservoir in the world. Water is an excellent basis for cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, because ecology knows no political borders. Mosquitoes can fly twenty-five kilometers a day - they don't need passports and you can't shoot them down with missiles. KKL-JNF understood the environmental and political importance of this project and made it happen. In the future, we hope to establish a Peace Park on either side of the line where children and their families will be able to enjoy the fruits of cooperation between our two peoples."

The Governor General was invited to unveil the stone commemorating his visit to Israel and the Bahan water reservoir, after which **Robert Schneider**, the Chief Executive of KKL-JNF Australia, thanked him for his visit to Israel: "We were in the Negev, where we dedicated the park in memory of the ANZAC fighters, and now we are at the Bahan reservoir, where water gives life to this and to future generations, a political and ecological heritage that KKL-JNF hopes will be better than the one we received. We would like to honor you with an inscription in the Golden Book of Jerusalem. Many world luminaries are inscribed in this book, but today I would like to note that it includes the names of Holocaust survivors. Thank you for honoring us with your presence here."



Left: Mr James Larsen, Ambassador to Israel, Mrs. Jeffrey, Maj-Gen Michael Jeffrey, and Efi Stenzler

The KKL-JNF World Chairman invited the Governor General to dedicate and water an olive tree that will be planted a few months from now, when the seventh sabbatical year is over, during which Jewish tradition stipulates that the land must lie fallow. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Governor General said that he would be looking in from time to time on this project as part of his retirement activities. "In addition, I expect a report every few years on the progress of my tree!"

Once again, congratulations to KKL-JNF for everything it has, and will accomplish."

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