

Qatar at the crossroads

Diminishing natural resources, air quality, the impact of climate change – Qatar is facing a host of local and global environmental issues. HE Abdulla Bin Mubarak Bin Aaboud Al Midhadi, Minister of Environment, discusses the Ministry's role in realising the National Vision 2030 – and ensuring harmony between economic growth, social development and environmental protection

One of Qatar's most important challenges is to address the pressures on the marine, coastal and land environment as a result of the large urban and industrial development it is going through. Like the other countries of the world, the state also faces the urgent challenge of global warming. Assessing the severity of these risks and dealing with the anticipated changes requires coordinated effort, capacity building and improved governance. This is the role of Qatar's Ministry of Environment.

The Ministry is the state institution responsible for protecting the environment and endangered wildlife and natural habitats. Since the Emiri Decree of 2008, its remit has included key functions such as drawing up environmental protection plans with the help of government agencies and other institutions; assessing

these activities and other procedures and projects that affect Qatar's environment; formulating and enforcing national environmental regulations and systems; identifying pollution problems and proposing suitable solutions; working with national and international bodies on environmental agreements; and raising public awareness of the issues in Qatar.

As part of its strategic plan to achieve a balance between economic development needs and protecting the environment, the Ministry is implementing a wide range of projects. For example, there are other air and environmental quality initiatives for the continuous monitoring of radiation levels in Qatar, electronic tracking of dangerous materials to ensure safe transportation and the drafting of a national strategy for hazardous waste disposal.

In the area of fisheries we are encouraging research and practices to preserve Qatar's fish stocks. A major new project is underway to construct an aquaculture and fish farming research centre in Ras Al Matbakh. Part of the coast is being prepared to encourage private sector investors to invest in fish farming, and the movements of ships in fishing ports are being electronically recorded.

We are also encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, to ensure food security in the future. A new project in Al Mazrouaa will help Qatari farmers to market their crops directly to consumers, avoiding the need for middlemen, and so increase their revenues. Farmers often have to travel long distances to access agricultural services, and we will be establishing new centres in Al Khor and Al Shamal to provide local assistance with livestock issues, crop disease prevention advice and the provision of mechanical services for farms. At the same time, agricultural research stations are being developed in Al Utoriya, Rodat Al Faras, Umm Qarn Nursery and other locations.



A collaboration between the Ministry of Environment and the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD) proposes to improve the productivity of sheep, goats and camels in Qatar through state-of-the-art breeding programmes developed at the Ministry's Animal Production Research Station in Umm Al Quhab Farm. Another major Ministry project, in cooperation with key international companies specialising in animal production and food security, will develop pasture land and meat production in Qatar.

Greening Qatar

The Ministry is also involved in a number of events linked to the Qatar Green Project, including the 3rd Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition (QIAE) Project 2010–2011. This annual event is a valuable opportunity to develop Qatar's agricultural sector by showcasing the latest equipment and products and exchanging agricultural

expertise. Another national project, Unlimited Afforestation 2009–2010, has evolved to plant areas lacking vegetation, such as schools and reserves. The aim is both to address the challenges of climate change and embed principles and concepts that improve the quality of the environment. Similarly, there are projects to rehabilitate nature reserves by planting native Qatari trees and to reuse ablution water to cultivate mosque gardens.

Other Ministry projects are focusing on protecting wildlife (studying Qatar's sea turtles and sea cows) and endangered natural habitats, such as mangrove swamps and the coral reefs in Halul Island and Umm Al Arshan.

A watchful eye

The Qatar National Vision 2030 identified the need for an agile and comprehensive legal system to protect the environment, and the Ministry has been striving to enforce the environmental standards issued in 2002 and 2005. Around 75 per cent of the state's factories now fall under the umbrella of Qatari law. The remaining factories, which were built before 2005, are cooperating with the Ministry using the 'Best Available Technique Not Entailing Excessive Cost' (BATNEEC) approach to meet the required criteria within the specified time limit of 2014.

In addition, via the Department of Industrial Monitoring and Inspection, the Ministry continuously monitors air quality

Qatar will see more green scenery and plants thanks to initiatives such as the Qatar Green Project and Unlimited Afforestation 2009–2010

Indigenous green scenery (below) and a young plant (opposite)



Environmental awareness campaigns emphasise the role of the family, particularly mothers, in instilling environmental awareness among children, who constitute Qatar's present and future

in Qatar through three fixed stations and a mobile one in Doha and its suburbs. The readings consistently show there are no high concentrations of carbon dioxide or nitrogen dioxide. This complies with Qatari environmental standards, which in turn are based on international standards.

The General Department of Laboratory and Standardisation Affairs (GDLSA) continues to update, issue and approve Qatari standard specifications and technical regulations concerning health and safety. GDLSA is consolidating its relationships with counterpart international organisations to exchange information and technical expertise in the field of laboratories and standardisation. GDLSA is planning a project to use treated wastewater in industry, and is also considering projects to recycle construction waste in new building and road work.

On the subject of waste, the Ministry has defined procedures for disposing of different types of hazardous material, at approved disposal locations. The Ministry's inspection plan covers the entire state, and routine visits are made to schools to check the quality and validity of the chemicals used in their laboratories.

Forward thinking

Developing an environmentally aware population is a key success factor in protecting the environment for future generations. The Ministry considers education a priority and has completed the preparation of the environmental curriculum for school students and teachers. Objectives and concepts have been developed and the curriculum has been overseen by a group of educators, university professors and environmental experts. The principles and methods for teaching the curriculum are being investigated before it is applied. It is important that all ages and sectors of the community, from kindergarten upwards, are aware of the issues and we have allocated female environmental experts to girls' schools, to avoid one obstacle that may hinder this important educational process.

At the same time the Ministry is intensifying awareness of the necessity of preserving the environment and its natural resources through various media and public participation campaigns. We are emphasising the role of the family, particularly mothers, in instilling environmental awareness among children, who constitute Qatar's present and future. The recent Environment Fair in Doha has helped to make Qataris more aware of the need for everyone to take individual responsibility for protecting the environment.

Environmental development to meet the needs of the current generation without harming the interests of future generations is one of the four pillars of the National Vision. A national committee reports to the Ministry of Environment, including representatives from Qatar Petroleum, Qatar University and the Civil



Aviation Authority, which aims to set national standards for minimising emissions that cause global warming and encourage all initiatives in this regard. Many companies are already taking steps, for example, the oil and gas sector is using the latest systems and technologies to improve the efficiency of production and consumption. The Al Shaheen Project in Mesaieed Industrial City is registered as a clean development project in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol. Moreover, Qatar is positively encouraging its scientific research centres to develop renewable energy technologies.

Of course, the Qatari environment is part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) environment, and the Ministry is also coordinating its efforts with those of the other GCC states to create solutions to the challenges facing the marine, land and air environment in the whole region.

We are developing our environmental policy not just for the next five years, but to achieve the Qatar National Vision 2030.