

# UAE water supply faces 'big danger'

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ABU DHABI // The UAE's water supply is in "big danger" of being depleted and solutions must be found quickly to address the problem, a senior Federal National Council member warned yesterday.

"There is a big danger facing the water reserves in the UAE," said Khalid bin Zayed, the chairman of the committee in charge of foreign relations, planning, agriculture and mineral wealth. "Therefore, we have taken up the issue of water resources."

Mr bin Zayed's committee will present a report on the country's water resources to the FNC today. Rashid Ahmed bin Fahad, the Minister of Environment and Water, will respond.

"The UAE [has] limited water resources," Mr bin Zayed said.

The country's rapid economic expansion and burgeoning population have meant a greater need for the precious resource, and the FNC is keen to explore ways to increase the country's reserves while also conserving what is currently available.

"I hope the issue is taken seriously and dealt with quickly so we can build up the reserves as soon as possible," Mr bin Zayed said.

The UAE had taken several steps recently to address the problem, but these were not enough, he said. The Emirates relied on desalination plants, which were vulnerable to sea pollution and not cost-effective.

Underground reserves are seen as a crucial line of defence, and pumping water into underground aquifers for storage is one option under consideration. A Dh1.6 billion project to pump fresh water underground is ongoing in Liwa.

The reserves would be a last line of defence in an emergency, such as an oil spill that contaminated the water supply. "We need innovative and speedy solutions," Mr bin Zayed said. "Future generations will also need this water."

Humaid al Qattami, the Minister of Education, will also be present today to respond to questions on the hiring practices of teachers. The FNC has several times called for higher teachers' salaries to entice them to stay in government schools.

Saqr Ghobash Saeed Ghobash, the Minister of Labour, is also expected to respond in writing to a question on when the ministry plans to revise some elements of its sponsorship system. FNC members are eager to introduce measures that would prevent the system's misuse.