



“The Water Framework Directive and the Mediterranean Regions”

Proposal of the “Water” Working Group of the Intermediterranean Commission

APPROVED BY THE POLITICAL BUREAU OF THE INTERMEDITERRANEAN COMMISSION

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I. For the Mediterranean, water is life. It is also the base of our economic development and of the improvement of our competitiveness.

II. We are aware of the great improvements the first waves of European directives brought for our waters. Firstly, in the 70s and 80s, conditions were imposed to make waters fit for various uses (urban water supply, fish farming, bathing, mollusk farming). Later, in the 90s, conditions were imposed on the sources of pollution (urban waste water, agricultural nitrates, dangerous substances, etc.).

III. From 2000, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) began a new phase, with a more general objective pretending to ensure a good status for all waters and protecting the ecosystems which depend on them. Though very ambitious, this objective alone does not offer the global framework necessary to unite all elements of integrated water policy. Indeed, this objective addresses mainly the quality of aquatic ecosystems, ignoring the benefits of water usage and the quality of other ecosystems where it is used. More significantly, apart from water quality, this objective ignores quantitative measurements in all aspects. In this sense, further Directives were issued later on, as the one regarding Floods (2007) or the Communication of the Commission on Water scarcity and droughts (2012), which key objectives of reducing water scarcity and vulnerability to droughts fully concern the Mediterranean area.

IV. The importance of water resources to European citizens has been highlighted by the recently accepted European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) on the Right2Water, which will mark a milestone as the first ECI to be legislated upon by the European Commission. The Right2Water demands that all citizens of the EU have a right to water and sanitation; that the supply and the management be not governed by norms of the internal market and be excluded from the scope of liberalization and, finally, that the EU steps up its efforts to ensure universal access to water and sanitation.

V. Now in mid-revision of the WFD, we consider that the opinions of the regions must be taken into account in the final document, given their direct knowledge of the issues at stake and their key role in the application of many of the necessary measures. Furthermore, in the case of Mediterranean regions, there are a number of particularities which were not sufficiently acknowledged in the Directive of 2000. The Commission has admitted this in its *Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's waters* in that it does **not** propose **only one solution** for all situations. In fact, the latter Communication lists a number of measures to help overcome obstacles and achieve the objectives of the WFD in the long term. We therefore assumed that the Commission was aware of this quantitative problem regarding water, and that it encouraged works in this sense.

VI. It is may be the time to explore common experiences in the Southern European Countries which demonstrate that water transfers could be a relevant element of the solution in the Mediterranean area, as showed by the Aqua Domitia project.

Also, an interesting debate has started with regards to the application of article 9 of the WFD (water-related costs recovery), on the one hand because financially evaluating the benefits of territorial planning actions is rather a difficult task, and on the other hand because of the recent jurisprudence of Court of Justice of the European Union on the matter.

VII. We believe it is important that the Mediterranean regions bring their voices and experiences to this revision process. Despite the significant variability from one basin to another, these regions share the main problem linked to the structural scarcity of water resources and aridity, aggravated by ever more frequent periods of drought—which, in the frame of the WFD, could be qualified as permanent drought.

VIII. Indications show that climate change will exacerbate this situation (IPCC 2007). Flooding which often constitutes the second problem for these territories which hydrographic networks are for most cases limited to seasonal, intermittent or ephemeral rivers—will be more frequent. In reality, in the Southern European regions, the majority of fluvial systems (cliffs) could be described as “dry rivers” as water flows during a very limited period of time (sometimes only hours) after significant rain episodes. Problems of water quality in these rivers generally derive from the very lack of resources itself.

IX. We are aware that there is great diversity in the ways each region intends to resolve these problems and, as such, it is difficult to reach wide-scale strategic agreements. However, an understanding of the experiences and good practices applied in each region shall be useful to attain better management solutions while avoiding errors. Several regions, such as the Valencian Community, Murcia and Andalucía in Spain, are already applying many of the measures cited in the Commission’s *Blueprint*: application of tariffs, consumption measurements, reuse of water, savings through modernization of irrigated areas, water transfers, desalinization, use of the mechanism of exchange of water use rights, etc. As such, they know the advantages and disadvantages of each system, and are therefore a very interesting starting point for input.

X. Furthermore, certain regions such as the Valencian Community already have significant experience in implementing territorial action plans to fight against the risk of flooding.

XI. At the same time, a favorable climate and fertile soil has in turn allowed the expansion of highly productive agriculture in these regions. Modern irrigation systems have enabled an efficient use of water. There exist therefore highly effective and environmentally friendly irrigation systems as well as supplementary watering systems that guarantee harvests and the quality of produce without changing the existing farming model, which fulfils a social function and helps to restore territorial balance like in Catalonia.

XII. The delocalization of agriculture and of coastal tourism, not to mention of the population inhabiting these coastal regions permanently, is not an alternative. We must solve the problems of water stress, applying the appropriate measures, through concrete actions and relevant economic instruments, following the hierarchy of water uses.

XIII. One starting point that we cannot forget is that, precisely in this type of basin, which have experienced significant water stress for decades, there are already high standards in application and development of such measures, particularly in reuse of treated waters and in modernization of irrigation. As such, the marginal cost of improvements is very high. Besides, there are, as of yet, no users to benefit directly from them, which is the reason why interconnected networks allowing the mesh and exchange between users and systems exist. They are indeed indispensable, as they often are the only way to address droughts. In any case, they contribute to make the whole system more efficient as this efficiency is fostered not only in deficient basins but also in surplus-water ones.

XIV. It would be highly necessary to re-discover and re-apply traditional technologies for water management, as well as to foster good practice exchanges. These elements should be part of any water management strategy to be applied to the Mediterranean regions. Specific measures for water natural conservation find themselves in this frame, through the use of masonry walls, small reservoirs in the valleys, etc.

XV. Furthermore, due to the new climatic situations, irrigation management plans and strategies to improve water-use efficiency as well as the safeguarding of water volumes and the quality of such systems must be developed. In this sense, we also request that new attention be brought to irrigation. Since it is not possible to solve already critical situations, better is to prevent them from happening. This is the reason why we should start working on irrigation in advance, instead of on the classical system, by replacing small quantities of water more frequently in order to avoid stress water situations.

XVI. Among the several irrigation systems currently used, drip and underground irrigation appear to be the two most relevant techniques to respond to agricultural needs. However, underground irrigation particularly represents an evolution for both the normal and the drip systems as it consists of an underground labyrinth built in accordance to the function of the ground texture.

From these elements, the Mediterranean regions reaffirm their compromise to fulfill the following strategic guidelines:

- To raise awareness of the particularities of the Mediterranean basins so as to ensure that the WFD include them in its revised version;
- To bring experience in terms of reuse/regeneration of waters, knowledge on high efficient low cost techniques, as well as on the norms applicable to the use of such water (Spain has had this norm since 2007). This is a key point, as the Commission is currently working on optimizing the reuse of treated waters through a consultation document to be sent by all interested parties before November 2014, and for which contribution the Intermediterranean Commission will be particularly active given the added value it can bring;
- To bring experience in terms of modernization of irrigation systems and of the different scenarios for application of the savings obtained, and also for back-up watering systems and social interest;
- To bring experience in water transfers, as well as in their control and efficient uses;
- To bring experience in the joint management of surface and underground waters, as well as on how to combine the aforementioned measures and the necessary participation of different users;
- Analysis of the particularities and the challenges in application of Article 9 of the WFD for the recovering of costs in common concrete cases happening in our coasts. For example, in the case of improvements of coastal wetlands associated with agricultural activities or developed for this purpose. The benefits from territorial land management are, to the same extent, hard to evaluate financially;
- Analysis of actions towards the achievement of the WFD that would help to alleviate the problems of scarcity and drought, etc., and which implementation is sustainable but shall not cost and/or finance upfront investments;
- To strengthen innovation initiatives in terms of water reuse, to encouraging the exchanges of good practices and experiences in diverse uses.