

## Foreword

When we started working on this volume, we had a clear idea about the topics that should be covered to provide a fair view about Spain's water policy. Although a generation stands between us, we were both convinced that Spain was undergoing a profound transition from an almost exclusive supply-side type of policy to the much more complex and conflicting context in which most mature water economies typically evolve. We seized the opportunity to assemble a collection of essays about water policy in Spain convinced that the volume would need to contain a clear vision on how to face the most pressing needs and challenges. In 2004 the change of Government brought to power new ideas and seemed ready to embark in a new era, after a decade of discussions and two failed attempts to pass a National Hydrological Plan. The book, we thought, would go to print by the time the new Government should have had the time to put forward new water policies. These, we surmised, would be more targetted to address the most pressing environmental problems, facilitate more efficient water allocation, and to solve or mitigate the current water political conflicts.

Unfortunately, the swinging regime of Spanish water policies did not stop, and in fact one would come to the conclusion that the pendulum now moves more erratically than before, and more heavily influenced by policies that are drafted and approved at the European Union level, such as the upcoming reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (the famous 'CAP' health check') or the application of the Water Framework Directive. Yet, as editors, we felt the obligation to ensure that the most updated and forward-looking strategic thinking had a voice in the volume. Second thoughts, however, suggested otherwise. For, in the absence of structured and clear strategy, it was far more valuable to let the reader build his or her own conclusions about the future. We are convinced that the analysis of the successes and failures of the Spanish water policy may be useful, mainly for water decision-makers in arid and semiarid countries where irrigation is the main water use.

Our purpose, then, was to provide all the needed background as well as cover the present and past policies, together with a description of the state of water resources in Spain in sufficient detail. In writing this foreword, we are tempted to entertain the hypothesis that drafting 20-year national water plans and getting them approved and accepted is similar to Penelope's weaving of Laertes' shroud by day and undoing it by night. Perhaps it is impossible to have such a robust and detailed plan, a conjuncture that would be followed by the conclusion that Spain has lost 15 years searching for such chimeric goal. On the other hand, technological and political advances, generally positive, are so rapid and relevant that the adaptation to them may be one of the most important aspects for any water policy. Fortunately, despite such never ending discussions about what best water planning is or should not be, the country learned a lot and both the lay public and experts became more educated on complex water problems. Ultimately, this is what this book is about.

Despite the fact that the reader will run into that so-called and demised National Hydrologic Plan in many chapters, the objectives and the constraints too have changed as a result of a better understanding of what is economic and politically feasible. Since problems related to water resources have been aggravated as a result of economic growth and increasing water demand, policies below the national level (regional or local) have proved to be far more superior, efficient and expedite in many instances. In addition, the European Union's Water Framework Directive (WFD) passed in 2000 has added more constraints and put the environmental objectives just below ensuring a sustainable and reliable water supply to the people. However, more than in any other European country, the main water consumptive use is for irrigation (75%). Therefore the issues or conflicts

with farmers are far more relevant than in most European countries. In numerous respects, Spain began the WFD race ahead of many other EU Member States because it has fairly well developed and resilient water institutions. So the elements for terminating the transition period and for implementing a national strategy for water are now in place. It is the policy delivery part what most volume's contributors seem to be missing, and we are not in a position to make that up.

Nevertheless, our final perspective is rather optimistic. There are already now some available technological improvements that hopefully will contribute significantly to solve the current problems. For instance, communication technologies (internet) is going to be a great help in order to improve education of farmers and the public at large, and to facilitate stakeholders participation thanks to a greater transparency in data information. Another relevant aspect is that seawater desalination technology and a cheaper and faster transport of food is going to change the concepts of water and food security.

We formulated the objectives and broad contents of the book after extensive thinking and numerous conversations. But we have benefited to no measure by the clarity with which the whole project was conceived from Dr. Ariel Dinar, Professor at the University of California, Irvine. We can only express words of gratitude and professional respect for his advise, generosity and clear ideas.

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*The Editors*

Alberto Garrido & M. Ramón Llamas

*Note:*

All contributors use the following exchange rate €1 = \$US1.3 when making conversions to the American currency, as this was the exchange rate in July 2008. In terms of measurement units, the volume uses the metric system (1 hectare = 2.5 acres; 1233 cubic meter = 1 acre-foot; 1 cubic hectometer = 1 million cubic meters (Mm<sup>3</sup>) = 811 acre-feet = 1 gegalitre).