

NATIONAL HYDROLOGICAL PLAN & WATER TRANSFERS : AN UPDATE ON  
THE SITUATION OF SPAIN  
May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

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BARCELONA WATER SUPPLY: HASTY AND EXTREME MEASURES QUESTION  
SPANISH WATER POLICY.

Catalonia was since last February on “level II” water alert (watering and swimming pool fillings restrictions) which starts when there is only 165 hm<sup>3</sup> left in the reservoirs. The Ter Llobregat reservoirs as well as the local ones were also down to 20% of their capacity (from 15% on, water is no more drinkable).

But on May 12<sup>th</sup> it was established that reservoirs level had recover considerably thanks to recent heavy rain, “level II” alert being then off with 170,75 hm<sup>3</sup> (filling level back to 27,86 % ).

Nevertheless, emergency measures taken by the Spanish government and the Catalonian Generalitat were kept.

They consist in three points:

1. To ship to Barcelona drinking water from Tarragona (93 mi south of Barcelona) and from Marseille.
2. To make a water transfer from the Ebro River to Barcelona.
3. To revive the idea of a water transfer from the Rhône river to Barcelona.

These three measures are to be replaced by three desalination plants, the 1<sup>st</sup> one to be ready for the end of 2009.

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> sea tanker arrived from Tarragona on May 13<sup>th</sup>, as a test run to check the facility. Two tankers will arrive on May 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. At the end of the month, the Ter Llobregat reservoirs will receive 1 660 000 m<sup>3</sup> monthly, corresponding to 6 % of the consumption of the 5.5 million people depending on the network.

The “Société Marseillaise des Eaux” will provide 551 700 m<sup>3</sup> monthly, with 17 shippings of 2 boats. The “Société Canal de Provence” will provide 442 500 m<sup>3</sup> of water from the Verdon river with 11 shippings of 2 boats.

These shippings will cost 22 million € a month.

2. The water transfer from the Ebro River has been approved by Parliament on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008. It consists in a 40 mi canalization between CAT (Tarragona Waters Consortium) and ATLL (Sistema Ter-Llobregat). The “Conduccion CAT-ATLL” (a “temporary union of companies”) will be in charge of the works. It is held in majority by the AGBAR Company (General Company of Barcelona Waters). The works will cost 164 million €, plus 6 million € for another supervising company. The works are planned to be ready for October 15<sup>th</sup>. This connection should avoid autumn domestic restrictions

and is planned to be “reversible”, enabling to supply Tarragona in case of need.

3. The idea of transferring water from the Rhône River to Barcelona is supported and called for in Madrid by the CiU party (Convergencia i Union), opposed to the president Zapatero’s party. The latter nevertheless accepted to wake the idea up even if he had cancelled the main measures of M. Aznar’s National Hydrological Plan. This Plan included the project of a massive water transfer from the Ebro River to the south of the country, and a transfer from the Rhône River to compensate Catalonia loss. The Catalonian government, which belongs to the same party as Zapatero, is opposed to the idea of receiving water from France.

The Foundation for a New Water Culture is pleading for a moratorium on the water transfer works from the Ebro River to Barcelona and is asking local administrative areas to plan small and varied emergency measures.

It also reminds that if this exceptional situation of dryness had occurred next year, the problem would have been solved by the 1st desalination plant which should be ready for 2009.

The FNCA regrets that these hasty measures challenge the advanced water policy consistent with the water European Framework Directive that had been conducted until now with its collaboration.

It is really a shame that there had been no careful and rational anticipation of this drinking water supply problem in a region as populated and sensitive as the Barcelona area.

The situation of emergency has been an excuse to disregard more rational solutions; the measures taken have comforted the idea that “harsh technology”, with its heavy and expensive infrastructures, is the only solution to ecological and social problems. These measures are encouraging water waste, draining both public funds and aquatic ecosystems. They are a first step towards a more and more commercial water policy, making a commonplace the transportation of huge quantity of water with all the ecobiological impacts that this can have, as much for the giver basins as for the receiver ones.

The Spanish government seems to question its water policy to go back to a “supply policy”, more and more massive whatever the impacts it can have and despite a disastrous global ecological situation. It should on the contrary support a “demand policy”, more economical and respectful of men and environment.