

Foreword

Aragon is a land of rivers. Even the name of this ancient kingdom derives from an ancestral word meaning ‘river’. It is a dry region, one of biodiversity and of great environmental value, a sparsely populated region that has known how to make a virtue of necessity and each challenge a gateway to the future.

Aragon is a thriving Spanish Autonomous Community, the driving force of the Ebro valley and strong in Europe, that, for various reasons, has found an opportunity for leadership in sustainable water management. The citizens of Aragon have shown concern for this issue as never before for any other.

In Aragon, people have learned how to turn theory into practice, and our watchwords have become what we Spanish speakers know as the ‘Three C’s’ of water management: *cantidad, calidad y consenso* (quantity, quality and consensus); three words that are vital requisites to ensure success in meeting the challenge of sustainable water management, each from his or her area of responsibility, local reality and global vision.

It was not by chance that Aragon pioneered the creation of a river-basin organization in the last century. Nor that, in this twenty-first century, it has built up cutting-edge practical experience in such aspects as the treatment of wastewater; cooperation among institutions in tackling water-cycle projects and, above all, the bold and clear commitment to dialogue through an organ of participation and debate without parallel in the world, as is the Aragon Water Commission.

Aragon’s Special Plan for Wastewater Treatment, in which more than €1 billion have been invested, is one of Europe’s most ambitious plans. This is the clear and conclusive commitment that the people of Aragon have made to achieve cleaner rivers, more full of life, and they have made it in the awareness that the quality—even more than the quantity—of water will be one of the major challenges of the future for any society. Investment in water treatment is, therefore, a strategic issue for Aragon. In works to manage the water cycle, the government of the autonomous community is supporting more than a thousand municipal projects with investment of more than €122 million during the 2002–08 period. By replacing obsolete infrastructure, these projects will bring savings equivalent to the consumption of a town of 15 000 inhabitants.

Its leadership on water issues has placed Aragon on the world stage. This international projection has been supported by the International Expo that Aragon’s capital, Zaragoza, is to host in 2008. Zaragoza is also the headquarters of the United Nations International Decade of Action, Water for Life, and of the International Centre for Water and the Environment (CIAMA), which the government of Aragon has installed on a splendid site at the entrance to the Galachos del Ebro Nature Reserve.

The CIAMA promotes prestigious events, as well as study and research forums, in cooperation with the most important international bodies. Its International Water Centre

is a permanent stage and forum for study and analysis of water and its management in the future. CIAMA's fine work was decisive in Aragon being awarded the presidency of the Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe (Encore), a body to which more than 100 regions throughout Europe belong.

One of the great achievements of the people of Aragon that I would like to underline—because the merit is shared by all citizens—is that Aragon is the only community in the world that has a forum for debate like the Water Commission, giving the maximum expression of commitment to dialogue and consensus on water development issues.

Although its resolutions are not binding, the Commission—a dependency of the Aragon Water Institute—has shown enormous merit in having them systematically regarded as such both by the administration of the autonomous Community and by Spain's central government. The commission has made possible the resolution of conflicts that had festered for decades without any sign of solution.

As a citizen of Aragon, it is a source of pride that the experience of our commission is analysed with such interest in the most prestigious of international water forums. It is experience that we must continue to build on in the quest for agreements in which we learn to harness viewpoints in order to achieve broad consensus, on the basis of economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Aragon has the additional merit of having won a place of political respect on water issues despite having almost no legal responsibility for them. Given that almost all of Aragon's waters form part of basins that are shared with other autonomous communities, legal responsibility for planning basically corresponds to the central government. Aragon's Statute of Autonomy, however, permits planning in the areas most closely related to water use, such as the environment, agriculture, regional planning, industry, tourism and sports.

Despite the excellent results that have been achieved, however, there is no room for complacency. Much remains to be done in the challenge of making Aragon a better place in which to enjoy quality of life.

I wish to express my sincere and heart-felt thanks to all the actors who, day by day, contribute to the effective management of water in Aragon. Applause is due to the dedication and effort of all the institutions, bodies, collectives and private individuals who have made a commitment to dialogue in order to make progress.

As Minister of Environment of Aragon and President of the Aragon Water Commission, I wish to thank the publishers, coordinators and authors of this prestigious publication for their excellent work in providing in-depth coverage of the most relevant aspects of water in Aragon.

The future is bright and full of hope. Thanks to everyone for believing in this land of rivers that is Aragon.

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