

Foreword

It is for me a pleasure to write the foreword for this special issue of the *International Journal of Water Resources Development* devoted to water policy and management in Spain.

Optimizing water management in semi-arid countries such as Spain is a priority objective. The hydrogeological and geochemical study of water, together with the important role it plays in the biosphere, has developed significantly since the second half of the 20th century. The need for water as a fundamental tool for economic development has resulted in prospection methods for groundwater captation and techniques for the construction of infrastructures for storing surface water becoming priority research and development areas for the governments in countries where this resource is scarce.

However, the relationship between water resources and society has not developed to the same extent. Nowadays, the management and legislation of water resources are priority issues. The interest in this issue of the journal lies in the application of such measures in Spain.

Water resources in Spain were first regulated in 1866 by the Water Act. However, the act did not come into force and was replaced by the 1879 Water Act, which regulated surface water. Underground water is regulated by the 1985 act. One of the innovations of this law was that it defined the public water domain of the State and considered renewable continental waters, including both surface and underground waters, as public. Following the enactment of the 1999 act and several legislative dispositions, the Royal Legislative Decree was published in 2001, approving the amended text of the Water Act. Later, in 2003, that text was amended to incorporate the Spanish laws of Directive 2000/60/EC, establishing a community action framework for water policy.

All those laws influence water policy and management in Spain and their application on a regional scale and in relation to water uses. This special issue presents several subjects, including the problems derived from implementing the Water Framework Directive, the institutions devoted to water management, the policy and administrative problems, the overexploitation of subterranean aquifers—which has been a controversial issue for many years due to aquifers belonging to landowners prior to 1985—as well as other present-day subjects such as water pricing, desalination, and in the case of Andalusia, the management of the Guadalquivir basin.

Finally, I would like to highlight the importance of the work conducted by the researchers from different Spanish universities. I encourage them to keep on studying

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these important subjects for our country and others where water resources are scarce, the management of which from a global point of view would yield greater benefits for the economy and social welfare.

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