

THE TAGUS-SEGURA WATER TRANSFER

Lessons from the past

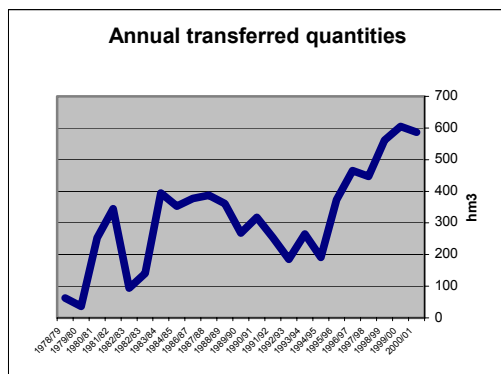
The Tagus-Segura water transfer is a clear example of how a big volume water transfer between river basins can sharpen the social, economical and environmental problems instead of solving them. WWF considers the Tagus-Segura water transfer a big mistake. The lessons from the past should lead to new ways of water management instead of more big volume water transfers, like the Ebro water transfer.

The water transfer in figures:

- In 1978 the first water runs through the transfer.
- From the Iberian System in Central Spain:
 - 600 hm³ of water goes to the Mediterranean Southeast region.
 - 50 hm³ of water goes to the protected area Tablas de Daimiel.
- Length: 286 km

More water, but not for irrigation

Since 1999 the whole 600 hm³ of water per year is being transferred. The main reason for the increase in transferred water is the improvement of the availability of infrastructures to make use of the water. In spite of this increase, not all planned irrigations are working. It can be concluded that the transferred water goes more and more to urban and tourist water supply instead of irrigation.



Disappeared water

During the years 1999, 2000 and 2001, in total 113 hm³ of the water has disappeared on top of the normal water losses during transport (already 15% of the transferred water). This could indicate that more water is used in urban water supply than legally permitted. Proof exists that this water is used in golf courses or theme parks, like Terra Mítica in Benidorm.

Negative impacts caused by the construction of the transfer

- The construction of the dams Entrepeñas, Buendía and Bolarque has led to the destruction of 11.400 hectares of protected natural areas.
- The vegetation in a strip of 10 to 30 m along 286 km of the transfer has been destroyed.



Illustration 1: The Tagus-Segura water transfer

The Tagus-Segura water transfer has serious negative impacts on the donor river basin

- 60% of the natural flow in the Tagus river basin is being transferred.
- The natural surplus decreased 10% due to climate conditions, while the amount of transferred water increased.
- There is less inflow of clean water and more inflow from the contaminated rivers from Madrid. This means that the water quality in the Tagus has deteriorated.



Illustration 2: Water reservoir in donor area

The Tagus-Segura water transfer has increased the problems in the receiving river basin

- The connection has provided the passage of foreign fish from one river basin to the other. The transfer is responsible for the introduction of the Red fish, the gudgeon and the Tagus-bogue in the Júcar river basin and the roach in the Guadiana river basin.
- The water deficit has grown from 500 hm³ in the seventies to 1000 hm³ in 2000, because the water users do not realise that the water resources have limits.
- The need for land by irrigated agriculture and tourism has led to the de-zoning of thousands of hectares of protected natural areas.

- The drainage of contaminated water from irrigation has led to problems of eutrophication of aquifers and surface water of which the jellyfish plague in the Mar Menor is a symptom.

Social problems instead of solidarity

- The population rates and the rent in the receiving basin have improved, while the ones in the Tagus headwaters have severely worsened.
- The water transfer has mainly benefited the bigger agrobusiness and construction companies and not favoured traditional farmers.
- Intensive irrigation has led to overproduction.
- The transfer has led to labour exploitation of immigrants and illegal immigration.

Demand management instead of offering more water

WWF considers that it's obsolete to base water management on a fixed demand and gives priority to management of water demand by, for example, water pricing or water savings campaigns. Increasing the water offer by means of a water transfer has been proven ineffective, so advocates not making the same mistake.

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