

ETHICAL ISSUES IN SPAIN'S WATER POLICY

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Spain is the most arid country in Europe. As a logical consequence the issues and conflicts related to water resources management are particularly relevant in comparison to other European countries. A knowledge and understanding of these issues might be a useful input for other countries in which the water problems are increasing. The main ethical issues related to the decision-making processes are ignorance, institutional inertia, neglect and corruption. The implication of these issues in water uses, mainly in irrigation is described. During the last few decades farmers in Spain have converted almost one million hectares to irrigation with groundwater. This development has been done with a limited control by the Water Authorities and practically without public funding. The Spanish Draft Water Plan now under discussion continues to be a traditional one that emphasizes large hydraulic infrastructures and presents very limited and biased economic and environmental analysis of the effects of these infrastructures. The frequent and practical dilemmas related to the application of the precautionary principle to Spain's water problems are also discussed. One final conclusion is that a sound and ethical water management demands equilibrium between the utilitarian and intangible values of water resources