Spanish National Hydrological Plan

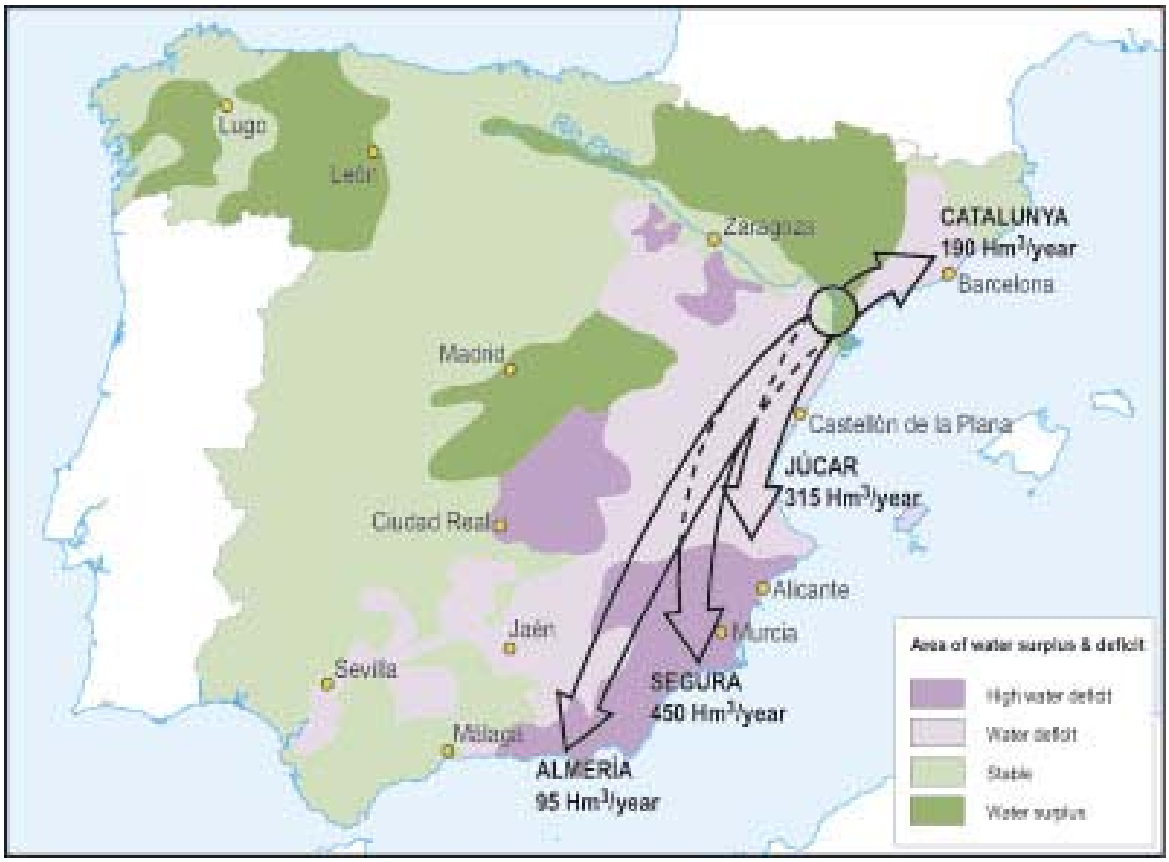
Source : http://www.grid.unep.ch/product/publication/freshwater_europe/pol.php

Adopted by the Spanish government in June 2001, the Spanish National Hydrological Plan (SNHP) foresees the building of 118 new dams (Spain already has 1,200 large dams) as well as huge transfers from the Ebro river to southeast Spain and from the Rhône river to Barcelona. The Plan calls for the re-routing of 35 rivers and tributaries and the building of 14 canals (one over 700 km long), a 900 km pipeline and all the supporting infrastructure. The Plan embraces a total of 889 projects. Environmental and other NGOs, as well as numerous academics, scientists, unions and political parties are involved in trying to halt this project, as they estimate it is contrary to sustainable development objectives. The European Commission and Parliament are critically reviewing the Plan, since a third of the project funding will come from the EU.

Environmental NGOs urged the Spanish government to apply a different, modern, and worldwide successfully applied alternative to large-scale water transfers. They massively reject the current plan, which was conceived more than 40 years ago. They estimate that it does not sufficiently consider economic alternatives to the large water infrastructure it promotes. It does not prioritise the option of reducing, for example, current water losses in urban water distribution systems, or introducing water banks, nor does it take into consideration recent techniques that reduce desalinisation costs by nearly half.

In April 2004, the new elected Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, has ordered a review of the entire workings of the Spanish National Hydrological Plan and cancelled its most controversial project, the Ebro Transfer.

NGOs are still concerned about some of the other infrastructure projects, notably the La Brena Dam in Andalucia, which would create an enormous reservoir in the middle of a Natura 2000 area, threatening local ecology and the endangered Iberian lynx.




Legend : Area of water surplus & deficit – High water deficit (violet), water deficit (clear-violet), stable (clear-green), water surplus (green).