



**Draft**

**Title:** **Saving Rivers and Natural Water Bodies From Drought and Mismanagement**

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1 The onset of climate change has disrupted the natural water cycle. Precipitation  
2 has become erratic and extended periods of drought are becoming more frequent;  
3 aquatic ecosystems are vulnerable to such fluctuations. Other human activity  
4 such as pollution, the construction of dams, excessive use of water for  
5 irrigation, mining activity, tourism and nuclear plants are taking a further  
6 toll on freshwater habitats. Moreover, water is a basic necessity for humans and  
7 any scarcity of drinking water brought about by drought or pollution may have a  
8 severe impact on the health and well-being of communities.

9 In the Mediterranean region many rivers run through several countries and over  
10 the years, conventions and treaties have been established in order to ensure  
11 international cooperation in safeguarding the rivers and to promote their  
12 health.

13 The rivers of Greece are an ecologically sensitive and species rich habitat.  
14 They are home to more than 220 species of birds and 34 species of fish. The  
15 delta regions of these rivers are fragile habitats, vulnerable to soaring  
16 temperatures and a marked tendency towards desertification. The natural flow of  
17 these rivers is seriously impeded by the presence of hydroelectric power  
18 stations, excessive uptake of water and the construction of dams, often without  
19 the necessary planning and environmental impact assessments. Lakes and other  
20 wetlands in Greece occupy a vast area; agriculture here is mostly limited to  
21 small scale farming enterprises. Whilst this has been beneficial to the

22 ecosystem here, it has also led to a high dependence on food imports, driving up  
23 inflation to unsustainable rates that have been further exacerbated by Russia's  
24 war on Ukraine.

25 The infrastructure distributing water to thousands of towns and villages across  
26 Greece is old and inadequate and huge amounts of potable water are lost due to  
27 leaks in the system. Much of the pipeline network in Greece contains asbestos,  
28 which is considered a health hazard. The central Greek Government has enacted a  
29 law that shifts the management of water resources to centralized control, away  
30 from the local communities. Thousands of people protesting this law were  
31 unheeded by the Government.

32 Italy, Slovenia, and other countries in Europe face a similar situations of  
33 mismanagement. In Ljubljana, the aquifer which supplies drinking water to the  
34 capital and around 330,000 people is going to be disrupted with the construction  
35 of the C0 canal. This project, the building of an additional 130km of sewage  
36 network, will flow over the area of groundwater, including the catchment of  
37 drinking water.

38 In the Iberian peninsula, Spain and Portugal share five rivers, the major ones  
39 being the Duoro (Spanish: Rio Duero, Portuguese: Rio Duoro), the Tagus (Spanish:  
40 Tajo, Portuguese: Tejo) and the Guadiana. Since the 1960s, the two countries  
41 have entered into agreements, pledging cooperation and joint management of these  
42 rivers. The Albufeira convention was signed in 1998, seeking to promote  
43 sustainable and fair use of these bodies of water. Notwithstanding this, the  
44 flow of water has often been insufficient to maintain the health of the  
45 ecosystems, adversely affecting important wetlands in protected areas. This has  
46 been particularly critical during periods of drought. It is clear that more  
47 effort and commitment is required to adequately manage these rivers and to avoid  
48 further ecological damage.

49 The year 2022 has been particularly dry; according to the Global Drought  
50 Observatory, Europe is facing its worst drought in at least 500 years. 60% of  
51 Portugal has experienced severe drought; 40% has been under extreme drought.  
52 Three years of very low rainfall and high temperatures have put Spain officially  
53 into long-term drought. 2022 was Spain's sixth driest – and the hottest since  
54 records began in 1961. (1)

55 Notwithstanding this, water usage has continued to soar to meet the demands of

56 intensive agriculture. Spain and Portugal have recently agreed that in these  
57 circumstances, that the minimum flows of the international rivers are not to be  
58 kept or respected. (2).

59 The Albufeira Convention lacks clarity regarding the computation methodology of  
60 the minimum flow levels that need to be maintained. On the other hand, farming  
61 corporations are relentless in their lobbying for favourable apportioning of  
62 water resources, without due regard for ecological requirements and water use by  
63 the community. The European Commission puts pressure on member states, including  
64 Portugal, to move forward with lithium mining destructive projects to meet  
65 industry's high demand despite the recognition of potentially significant  
66 environmental impacts, such as ecosystems and biodiversity depletion, water  
67 contamination and and increased demand in European territories facing drought.

68 Malta does not have any rivers. Much of the demand for water is met by  
69 desalination of seawater. Illegal extraction of groundwater has led to a  
70 severely depleted water table with elevated salinity levels. A supply of  
71 offshore groundwater may meet the country's requirements for 75 years, however  
72 extracting water from this resource is not easy and presents several  
73 technological challenges. Rainwater is also sparsely collected and most of this  
74 precious resource is simply channeled to the sea. Moreover, the law requires  
75 that residences should have a well to collect rainwater; however this law is  
76 infrequently implemented or enforced.

77 **The European Greens, gathered in Vienna state that:**

- 78 1. Water is a vital resource and its protection and rational use should be a  
79 priority;
- 80 2. Any strategy for water management needs to take into consideration the  
81 wellbeing of ecosystems and water requirements of the community.
- 82 3. Any strategy for the management of river water should respect the  
83 situation and realities in individual countries, ensuring that minimum  
84 ecological and daily human needs are met.
- 85 4. The Albufeira Convention between Spain and Portugal should be updated in  
86 the light of item 3.

- 87 5. As climate change intensifies, with disruptions to the water cycles  
88 becoming more frequent, agriculture needs to transition to less resource  
89 intensive practices, giving way to local farming methods better suited to  
90 regional climatic conditions.
- 91 6. The consumption of electricity needs to be rationalised. This is  
92 especially critical during periods of drought, limiting the amount of  
93 energy derived from hydrological sources.
- 94 7. It is essential to enact legislation protecting water resources,  
95 especially in drought ridden countries. Megaprojects that exert a  
96 disproportionate demand on water resources need to be controlled and  
97 capped.
- 98 8. Waste water should be seen as a precious resource which can reduce the  
99 burden on natural sources. Schemes to recover and better use greywater  
100 need to be devised and implemented.
- 101 9. The list of pollutants to be monitored in bodies of water needs to be  
102 updated, setting new standards for the control of contaminants, as  
103 proposed by the European Commission in October, 2022.
- 104 10. Desalination of seawater is an energy intensive process and should be seen  
105 as a last resort option for the production of drinking water. Rational use  
106 and effective management of natural water resources and investing in  
107 infrastructure to drastically reduce water leakage should be prioritized.
- 108 11. In view of increased incidence of droughts and strained water resources, a  
109 holistic approach that includes both mitigation and adaptation measures  
110 needs to be adopted.
- 111 12. The C0 Canal in Slovenia be planned in a way that is consistent with  
112 Slovenian legislation and European guidelines in the field of water  
113 conservation, and in regard with the above points.

114 (1) - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/04/13/spain-drought-  
115 andalusia-agriculture-crops-climate-change/50821b2c-d9e0-11ed-aebd-  
116 3fd2ac4c460a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/04/13/spain-drought-andalusia-agriculture-crops-climate-change/50821b2c-d9e0-11ed-aebd-3fd2ac4c460a_story.html).

117 (2) – In September 28, 2022 the Governments of Portugal and Spain made a joint  
118 declaration on the Compliance with the Albufeira Convention –  
119 ([https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-](https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3d%3dBQAAAB%2bLCAAAAAABAAzNDYyMgIAawW1ugUAAAA%3d)  
120 [ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3d%3dBQAAAB%2bLCAAAAAABAAzNDYyMgIAawW1ugUAAAA%3d](https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3d%3dBQAAAB%2bLCAAAAAABAAzNDYyMgIAawW1ugUAAAA%3d))