



Photo: J.L. Ordoñez



From planning to implementation Recommendations for action supporting adaptation in the Tordera River Basin

Key messages

- For enabling Catalonian water management policies to take adaptation to global change into account in its structure and practices institutional and juridical adjustments need to be made. Given that this entails the adoption of fundamental changes into sectoral policy design and implementation, strong political will and coordination of all responsible authorities is needed to support the process.
- Specific deliberative spaces, such as a Permanent Participation Centre, need to be developed to overcome current barriers to implementation of crucial but conflictive measures, such as environmental flows, enabling to negotiate innovative solutions together with water users.

Introduction

To ensure that adaptation strategies for adaptive water management are well designed, achievable and legitimised, they need to be developed in an open and transparent process with the active participation of a diversity of stakeholders, such as civil society, representatives of economic sectors and public authorities in the river basin. In this context, CREAM has led a collaborative process of developing the River Basin Adaptation Plan together with the basin's stakeholders. The plan includes 33 measures for enhancing adaptation to the impacts of global change on the river basin's dynamics, a suggested timeline for their implementation and an indication of which measures should be prioritised given stakeholder preferences and the local context.

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Presentation of priority measures

The participants taking part in the process within the Tordera river basin thoroughly evaluated the adaptation measures included in the River Basin Adaptation Plan, including the level of coherence with existing political framework, identifying barriers and opportunities for measures to be taken up into relevant planning processes. In this section, the most relevant measures which need the highest policy support to be implemented are mentioned.

The implementation of an environmental flow regime is considered by all participants by far the most important action to be implemented to face the challenge of recovering water quantity in the Tordera basin. This option would provide an answer to the current depletion of water bodies, reducing water abstraction levels and allowing a certain amount of water to be kept in the river for maintaining ecosystem functionality, restored hydrological connectivity, correct sediment dynamics, and enhanced biophysical quality of water.

Nevertheless, the implementation of environmental flows is seriously hampered by current jurisprudence on water use entitlements, as these foresee the owner should be refunded for lost benefits in accordance to the water use limitation requested. Thus, public administration would incur into disproportionate monetary costs to assure environmental flows. Even though the Water Framework Directive indicates that environmental flows are a previous restriction to the otorgation of water use rights (thus avoiding refunding) this was never applied due to the Spanish water management politics and jurisprudence in place. The Catalan Water Agency has developed a protocol for negotiating water use entitlements, consistent of different options with different degrees of costs and efforts for both parties, and applied this protocol as a pilot in the headwaters of the River Ter. Catalan water Agency should put an extra effort in overcoming the social, economical and political obstacles to the application of such a protocol to the whole Catalan River District, including the Tordera river basin, by strengthening its integrated water governance strategies.

To face the challenge to better apply integrated water management in the basin stakeholders remarked the importance of improving water governance and proposed the creation of a Permanent Participation Centre (PPC) for the Tordera basin. This centre would host a local Office of Catalan Water Authority oriented at creating better conditions for citizens to participate in the design and revision of water policies in the basin, including a documentation centre to improve access to relevant information and facilities where workshops and meetings can be organized on specific management challenges, as well as for capacitating and raising awareness amongst local actors. This measure would have a strong impact on a broad range of measures, not being implemented because of a lack of appropriate procedures to take local socioeconomic drivers into account in decision-making and technical planning. This proposal can count on the juridical dispositions already in place in the statutes of the Catalan Water Agency but lacks the needed political support and specific funding.

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Concluding recommendations for future action in the river basin

The Tordera River Basin's resilience to global change would be greatly increased by all actions directly oriented at recovering the river and related water bodies' ecological quality. Difficulties related to the transposition of the WFD principles into national legislation hamper this process, therefore Spanish Ministry for agriculture, food, and environment should take into account the European Commission's indications on the needed reforms. Moreover, the Catalan Water Agency should underpin and enhance this process inducing a revision of current water policy and legislation at regional level.

In order to enhance integrated water management for building resilience to global change, involved administrations, including agriculture and urban development, mining, industry and energy policy departments, need to increase their current level of transparency and accountability through better information management and citizen participation. In the same line, an extra effort is needed to improve control over the implementation processes of adaptation measures and availability of appropriate indicators for local follow up and monitoring to ensure effectiveness of the actions undertaken.

Furthermore, the process of developing a river basin adaptation plan for the Tordera River should be developed in line with other processes occurring in the territory, valuing the possibility to fill in existing governance gaps and contributing actively to build a harmonised policy framework.

With regards to the design of water management options to be truly adaptive, it is crucial that these are flexible, robust and integrate a multi-sectoral perspective. Therefore, it is particularly important to ensure a broad diversity of actors involved in the participatory approach and to promote a collaborative environment between different public authorities and local societies.

A renewed dialogue between stakeholders and the public administration is needed urgently to create the multidisciplinary approach necessary for designing and implementing effective solutions for facing global change and to managing trade-offs. Such an exchange would not only stimulate mutual learning processes, but also ensure that sufficient resources are made available to deliver the desired integrative participatory processes and achieve maximum success regarding their impact on decision making.

