

## Brazil Puts an End to an Era of Free Water

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Historically Brazil has never had water charges. However, three years ago water charges were installed on the Paraíba do Sul River which runs through the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

There, industries and other users are charged a low R\$ 0.02 (US\$ 0.009) per cubic meter of water, if they return the water after treatment. Anyone who uses the water without treating it has to pay four times as much.

According to João Bosco Serra, head of Water Resources at the Ministry of Environment, the revenue is used for river conservation, sewage treatment and general cleaning of the river. Some of the money goes into educational programs to make the population aware of the need for conservation.

The water charges system is supposed to be local, decentralized and participatory, run by basin committees and state water councils. 20 states have operational water councils and 7 others are in various stages of implantation.

In January water charges will be installed in the three rivers basins that supply the city of São Paulo half of its water, The rivers are the Piracicaba, Capivari and Jundiaí.

Serra points out that the present system of free water is highly wasteful; it is estimated that 40% of the water transported is lost. Under the water charges system the waste is almost eliminated.

Serra says that new system seems to be popular as can be seen by its reception at events like the 2nd National Environment Conference this week in Brasília, Brazil's capital. However, some NGOs say it favors business interests.

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