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The role of a policy package in resolving water conflicts: the case of the Californian drought and the Central Valley Project Improvement Act

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Existing environmental policies have deviated from measures suggested by economic and environmental analysis. This is especially true in the case in drought response and water reform policies where efficient solutions were rarely adopted. This suggests that for policy to be accepted it has to address both political and social barriers, particularly political feasibility. It is argued that the aspirations and the power of interest groups give rise to water policy multidimensional packages. These policy packages are more likely to be politically feasible and politically robust than policies with single objectives, and thus will be adopted by decision makers as a policy. The evolutions of the management strategies of the California drought of 1986-1992, and the negotiations over the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, are used as examples of timing and creation of politically feasible policy packages (including water trading and environmental water allocations) compromising conflicting interests.