

Dear Editor-in-Chief,

I am sending you our manuscript entitled “The paradox of the virtual water trade balance in the Mediterranean region” by Alexandros Gkatsikos and Konstadinos Mattas. We would like to have the manuscript considered for publication in *Sustainability*.

The article under consideration examines the effect of trade flows on water sustainability in a water-scarce area in the Mediterranean with a special focus on agriculture. As agriculture is the largest water consumer in an economy and the Mediterranean faces water shortages and desertification due to climate change, this study aims to identify the linkage between economic and environmental sustainability to provide evidence for policy makers.

Trade flow patterns were estimated and their effect on water consumption with the use of the virtual water trade balance methodology was evaluated. Although the virtual water trade is a concise, widely used indicator of water consumption, it is highly depended on the economic trade balance of the area. Therefore, it may prove misleading for decision makers that shape water policies as in some cases water-intensive sectors appear as water-saving.

The present study could prove useful to academics and policy makers that define and develop water policies and provide further knowledge in sustainable development and particularly the water-food nexus.

We confirm that this manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by another journal.

All authors have approved the manuscript and agree with its submission to *Sustainability*.