

"The new frontier of development is in the north of the country"



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Félix Bogliolo

Founding partner and chairman of the managing committee

Via Marina

By Juan Andres Abarca

BNamericas

With the country going through its third year of severe drought, Chile has increasingly been looking for innovative ways to tackle the problem.

One of these innovative projects is the so-called "water highway" initiative, aimed at transferring large bulks of water from the resource-rich southern regions to the arid north, first proposed by French consultancy firm and startup Via Marina.

To find out more, BNamericas sat down with Félix Bogliolo, founding partner and chairman of Via Marina.

BNamericas: Why did you choose Chile as a platform to develop this project?

Bogliolo: Well, we didn't really choose Chile, the country chose us. We're a startup company, and we developed this innovative product that we've invented, that has a lot of R&D behind it, and as every other startup, we've been looking for clients throughout the world. We have several projects at different development stages across the world.

The peculiarity here is that the Chilean government made it public, and we also had to disclose the information, as the prefeasibility studies were financed by France's FASEP program, which provides funds for studies and assistance to the private sector.

BNamericas: And is that a good or a bad thing?

Bogliolo: It's good, because it has helped me showcase the project around the world, everyone knows about the Chilean project because I've talked about it in conferences, and I use it as a business case. But it is also bad because it has created high expectations in the country that need to be taken very cautiously, because right now it's just a project, and as any other infrastructure project, it will take a long time to develop.

This is a project that has an impact in all sectors: the urban, agriculture, industry, mining sectors. It has great relevance for the entire north of the country, from Valparaíso to Arica, potentially. This is a project with a high social content, made to improve the quality of life of the 2mn people living in the area.

BNamericas: How can this project develop the northern regions?

Bogliolo: There's a great disparity of development between the north and the south of the country. Even though the mining potential is located in the north, the area is not really developed, and the potential development of the south is limited, because basically it's all developed. You might be able to irrigate a few extra hectares here and there, and yes, that helps, you can increase productivity, that's also feasible, but it's limited.

So you have to do what the Americans did during the conquest of the far west. They used to say "go west, young man." In this case it's "go north, young man." The new frontier of development is in the north of the

country. And what is missing in the north to develop? It's missing water and we have plenty of water down south.

BNamericas: What are the next stages of the project?

Bogliolo: The next step is to carry out the complementary studies that were mentioned by [former public works] minister Laurence Golborne, to get this project to the level of detail enough to launch a tender, which will be exclusively for one stretch of the project.

We still need to define the first stretch. I imagine it will start from [region VI's] Rapel river, where we could take a small amount of water, 5-10m³/s, and take it to another area also to be determined. I imagine it could be in [region V's] Valparaíso, Quilimarí or Quintero.

We have two to three years to carry out the studies, launch the tender. Building it will take an additional two years, and after that, when water starts to pour, we will see where we go from there, perhaps take them progressively up north, to Coquimbo, Copiapó, Caldera, etc.

About Félix Bogliolo

Félix Bogliolo is an engineer from France's École polytechnique. He has more than 35 years of experience in international strategy and finance.

About the company

Via Marina is a subsidiary of French construction giant Vinci.

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