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The use of economic analysis for water quality improvement investments

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Preface

I have a vivid recollection of the event in which I met Professor Henk Folmer and which resulted in the beginning of this important milestone in my life. It was May 2003, and I was organizing, while working as an Economist at the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), a workshop on water and poverty along with Professor Eugenio Figueroa, then Director of the National Center for the Environment at the University of Chile. On our way to lunch, we began to talk with Professor Folmer about our research activities in economics of water at the IADB. Prof. Folmer expressed his interest on the topic and inquired about my field of studies and about the topic of my doctoral dissertation. He looked somewhat surprised to learn that I had not completed my Ph.D. We had a long conversation about the challenges, but most of all, the opportunities of pursuing a doctoral degree. Upon my return to Washington, D.C., I sent Prof. Folmer some information about my previous studies and current research projects. A couple of months later, I was sitting in an office with Prof. Folmer at the University of Groningen finalizing the draft proposal of my dissertation and receiving the formal acceptance letter to the program. This manuscript is a vivid reflection of the end of that process.

Acknowledgements in a preface are a double-edge sword. On one hand, one wants to be able to thank all of those friends and family members that made a difference in your life and that provided you with invaluable support during the preparation of this manuscript. On the other hand, it is virtually impossible to remember everybody, and many of those friends and family that are left out may feel omitted and ignored. But the effort has to be made. I have to start by thanking my Mother for her courage to strongly advise me to pursue my life in another country and for her patience in my upbringing. I always admired her strength to raise two sons as a widow. Supporting a son to leave the country to start a new life has to be one of the toughest decisions a parent must make. A special thanks to Ignacio, my brother, for the invaluable company and endless conversations on life in general.

I arrived in the United States in August 1988, at the age of 21, in search of a new, but uncertain, life. I knew I wanted to go to the States but did not know exactly what the future would hold for me. I was lucky to arrive to the house of very close friends of my parents: Marc and Cynthia, to whom I am extremely grateful for hosting me for two years in their house, but most of all for guiding and advising me in the tough periods of my life. They were my support system in the States and I am privileged to have them in my life. Without them, I would not be here completing this manuscript. A special thanks to Lilian, my wife, for

her invaluable support through this lengthy and hard process. She was constantly reminding me of the importance of finishing the dissertation and was always aware of its tradeoffs, but . , and never stopped reminding me of the benefits of completing the Ph.D. Her love and encouragement provided me with the strength necessary to finalize the manuscript. I want to thank Sebastian, my 10 year-old son; with him around, completing my Ph.D. made much more sense. Maxim, my second son, was born exactly two weeks after I submitted the draft dissertation. One day he will realize that he provided additional inspiration to complete the manuscript before he was born; I had a visible and tangible deadline! I need to thank my very good friend, Marcel van den Heuvel. Marcel supported me with the required paperwork to move to the Netherlands for 18 months to begin writing this document, was a constant support through the process, and is now the person ensuring that this manuscript is printed on time. Special thanks to the Reading Committee Members: Prof. Eugenio Figueroa, Prof. Jouke van Dijk and Prof. Jan Oosterhaven for their patience and for taking their valuable time to read through this dense document. It is an honor to have these Professors be part of the Ph.D. process.

Last but not least, to Prof. Folmer. This 6-year process has been an amazing learning experience. I admire Prof. Folmer's dedication to the science and his patience with students. His perseverance and encouragement were crucial in the process. I am honored to have worked with such a solid professional. But most of all, I feel I gained a good friend and look forward to a long-lasting relationship.

Diego J. Rodriguez
September 2009

