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Identifying the origin of groundwater salinisation in the Sidi El Hani basin in central eastern, Tunisia

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14 Abstract

In the Sidi El Hani basin, located in central-eastern Tunisia, a shallow aquifer is the main 15 16 water source for agricultural practice. However, in the last few decades, it has undergone saline pollution. In this context, this study is carried out to identify the origin of the dissolved 17 18 species and the processes involved in the increase of groundwater salinization using 19 hydrochemical tools and geochemical modeling with PHREEQC. To achieve this objective, 20 water analysis was performed on 49 samples collected from 46 shallow wells and 3 21 observation wells during March and April 2015. The results indicate that for the samples 22 located near the Sabkha Sidi El Hani, the dominant facies of the groundwater is sodium 23 chloride (Na-Cl). The water samples are characterised by high salinity exceeding 6 g.L⁻¹. 24 However, in the centre of the basin, the water samples are a mixed type (Cl-Na-SO₄-Ca-Mg). 25 Our results show that salinisation of the groundwater was due to the dissolution of halite, 26 cation exchange, and the precipitation of carbonate minerals such as calcite and dolomite 27 coupled with the dissolution of gypsum, and evaporation. Intensive irrigation in the area 28 leading leaching of salts from the surface soils to deep soil layers are additional factors. This 29 soil leaching is the major process that accounts for salinisation of water and soil; it leads to 30 the accumulation of a bitter brine solution after the precipitation of evaporite minerals.

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