

Land Repossession in Spain Continues

Spain is the second most popular destination for tourists after France and is the most popular foreign location for Northern Europeans to own a second home. It is thought that there are more than 1,000,000 UK residents in Spain with most of them living on the Spanish costa.

Approximately 40% of the Spanish coastline is built on, with many of the properties built without the correct planning permission. The Environment Ministry has now launched an operation to protect the coastline and clear properties from more than 400 miles of coast.

The move sees the government using the Ley de Costas law, passed over twenty years ago, to reclaim the first 550 meters of the coastline. The plans apply equally to properties constructed without planning permission and those legally constructed. The plans are also likely to apply to bars, restaurants and hotels built along the seafront.

The decision of the government to apply the 1988 Ley de Costas law has been widely criticised and pressure groups have been set up to oppose the government. The move first announced in November of 2007 has resulted in many property owners being notified that their property is targeted by the scheme.

Some owners have already had the ownership of their property ~~removed~~ taken away, but have been allowed to stay on the premises on the understanding that the property cannot be sold or inherited.

A pressure group formed in Madrid now has over 20,000 members many of them non-Spanish citizens. The head of the pressure group Jose Ortega said "This is the single biggest assault on private property we have seen in the recent history of Spain" and he added "The state is destroying property without any concern for the law or human rights".

It is also alleged, that by applying the 1988 law retrospectively to property built in the 1970's, that the government is acting unlawfully in an unlawful manner.

The Spanish property market has always had a reputation for bribery and corruption, with local officials accused of taking bribes in exchange for planning permission. With this move the central government has shown it will no longer tolerate construction on the coastline no matter how good developers' connections with local officials are.

So far 1300 buildings constructed without planning permission have been demolished since the government came to power, with many more owners being issued with 60 year licences allowing occupation of the property for that time without the right to sell to individuals (they may however sell to the government). The multi billion euro scheme to improve the Spanish coastline will no doubt add to the beauty of an already stunning area but the cost to the residential tourist market will no doubt be a high one to bear.

These moves come at a time when the once well performing Spanish investment property market has cooled considerably, largely due to rising prices and the development of Eastern Europe as a property hotspot. When once, Spain afforded the prospect of cheap property and a comparatively cheap standard of living to northern Europeans, now investors are inclined to look further afield for bargains. The governments' move is likely to have a highly detrimental effect on an already struggling property market.

About the Author

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