

WCC-2016-Res-090-EN

Two dams on the Santa Cruz River in Argentina: their impact on an irreplaceable ecosystem and on the hooded grebe (*Podiceps gallardoi*) population, a Critically Endangered species endemic to Argentina

OBSERVING that in 2012 a project began to build two dams over the Santa Cruz River, criticised due to shortcomings concerning information vital for decision making, the lack of suitable forums for citizen participation and weaknesses in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), was brought by civil society organisations before the High Court of Argentina, which urged the State in April 2016 to present the corresponding impact studies;

CONSIDERING that the new Argentinian government, after informing in December 2015 that it would revise the initiative and the EIA process developed by the previous administration, agreed in May 2016 on a new project design reducing the number of turbines from 11 to 8 and the cost of the work in order to avoid environmental impacts;

CONCERNED because a lack of environmental impact from the new design appears to be taken for granted, with work on the project progressing without a new EIA and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the basin being carried out, and the impacts being unknown;

CONSIDERING that the Santa Cruz River estuary is a key site for the hooded grebe (*Podiceps gallardoi*), a species endemic to Argentina and Critically Endangered (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species);

CONCERNED because the dams will involve the loss of river valley habitat, the alteration of aquatic communities and impacts on estuarine ecosystems, which may lead to the extinction of the hooded grebe, which will be deprived of one of its main wintering sites, as well as other irreversible environmental impacts; and

WELCOMING the declaration of the Santa Cruz River as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International in order to maintain a large hooded grebe population outside of the breeding season, and other species such as the Magellanic penguin (*Spheniscus magellanicus*), the creation of the Patagonia National Park to protect the hooded grebe and the designation of the species as a Provincial Natural Monument;

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Hawai'i, United States of America, 1-10 September 2016:

1. URGES the Argentine Republic to stop all activities related to the Santa Cruz River dams project until the due EIA and SEA processes have been completed in line with current legislation, with the full and effective participation of all stakeholders and competent authorities within the framework of an informed and strategic debate on the country's energy decisions, ensuring that the Santa Cruz River basin ecosystem and the hooded grebe populations in Argentina are not affected;
2. CALLS ON the Director General to:
 - a. send a memo to the President of Argentina urgently, informing him of the appeal in paragraph 1, regarding the importance of complying with legal mandates concerning high environmental impact projects such as the dams on the Santa Cruz River, and also to refer to and send material prepared by IUCN on EIA and SEA processes, the precautionary principle, the impacts of hydroelectric projects and renewable energy alternatives, as well as other related issues that she considers relevant; and
 - b. offer, as far as possible, technical support for this project and its environmental impacts to Argentinian NGOs that are IUCN Members; and
3. ASKS the Species Survival Commission to send a memo to the President of Argentina urgently informing him about all the information available on the status of the hooded grebe, as well as the implications of a species being listed as Critically Endangered.

State and agency Members of the United States abstained during the vote on this motion for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Motions Process.