

Dams in the Alto Paraguay River Basin, the Pantanal and the Paraguay-Paraná Wetland System

RECOGNISING that the Alto Paraguay River Basin is the largest flood plain on Earth, the Pantanal, and that this territory was one of the priority regions for the installation of Small Hydropower Plants (SHP), which have been considered strategic for the expansion of Brazil's energy mix over the last few decades and that, despite their clean image, these 'development' projects cause irreversible impacts on the biophysical space and drastically alter the environment in which they are carried out, generating significant losses for the traditional communities in the Pantanal;

RECOGNISING that the Alto Paraguay Basin has 52 operational dams and there are plans to build 101 more, and that each of these infrastructure interventions has a negative impact on the landscape, especially the Pantanal, one of the regions of the world with the highest levels of biodiversity, thanks to the convergence of several biomes: the Cerrado, Amazonia, Mata Atlântica, Chaco and the Chiquitano Dry Forest;

CONSIDERING that the Pantanal forms part of the Paraguay-Paraná Wetland System, the largest in the world, which encompasses parts of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay;

HIGHLIGHTING the fact that the Pantanal was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme, with an internationally adopted, integrated management model, which is participatory and sustainable in the use of natural resources, and also contains four Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites);

OBSERVING that damming the rivers that flow into the Pantanal alters the natural rhythm of the waters of the largest tropical wetland in the world, which is home to a wide range of different plants and animals adapted to living in calm waters, with 1,000 species of bird and 300 species of mammal, including the jaguar, the capybara and the tapir; and

FURTHER OBSERVING that the total energy generated by these dams is insignificant for Brazil and that, of the 63.98% of all the hydroelectricity generated by Brazil, only 0.70% is produced in the basin;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France:

1. ASKS the countries whose territory includes part of the Paraguay-Paraná Wetland System to:

a. make an effort to carry out more detailed studies of the impacts caused by the construction of major projects in the Alto Paraguay Basin and to permanently monitor the possible impacts of the dams in operation to obtain guidelines for strategies and actions aimed at mitigating the impacts upstream and downstream;

b. promote processes and mechanisms for discussion between the respective governments and civil society and for the protection of towns in the Pantanal and along the shores of the Alto Paraguay River Basin;

c. consider as general ideas on the management systems for transboundary waters that:

i. the transboundary waters should be used in an equitable, reasonable and optimal manner;

ii. each State bordering on a transboundary river system has the sovereign right to use the water in their territory without causing "significant damage" to other States bordering on the river system;

iii. the principle of "profit sharing" and of "eliminating damage within the framework of joint responsibility" should be followed on a basin level; and

iv. all the States bordering on a transboundary river system, and these States only, should form part of the solution and cooperation in terms of transboundary water resources;

d. adopt as a state policy that the infrastructure projects should be presented for an Integrated/Strategic Environmental Assessment during the planning phase;

e. adopt strategies to minimise the impacts the country suffers overall along with civil society;

f. suspend the installation of new hydroelectric projects in the region until the synergistic impacts are better understood, and encourage the opening of a process to carry out surveys to find alternative options that can avoid these projects;

g. discourage the funding of this type of project in the region; and

h. create national programmes for the management and conservation of the Pantanal System with an integral, holistic, transboundary vision, highlighting in their programmes for economic, energy, social and environmental development the great relevance of this System for the stability of the Planet's climate as well as for the conservation of species and the poorly known interactions carried out there; and

2. URGES the international organisations, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to:

a. take into account the movement to relax Brazil's environmental regulations, an issue that, combined with economic and financial incentives, requires the urgent integrated management of the basin, considering the potential of those policies to promote the acceleration of the introduction of hydraulic projects in the region;

b. take into account the fragile status of the Pantanal in the face of infrastructure projects in the Alto Paraguay Basin; and

c. call on the IUCN Regional Office for South America (IUCN-Sur) and the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) to promote a regional event with the participation of Members and experts.