

WILL YOU LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY FOR NATURE?

BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, EEB (European Environmental Bureau), Friends of the Earth Europe and WWF European Policy Office call on Commissioner Karmenu Vella to take decisive action in his remaining time as EU Environment Commissioner to improve the implementation and enforcement of the EU's world-leading nature laws – the Birds & Habitats Directives¹.

Hydropower dams: threats to the implementation and enforcement of

The #NatureAlert Countdown is on! But there is still time to take action to save threatened wildlife and habitats across Europe, such as the “Amazon of Europe” – the Drava River!

European biodiversity is in freefall. Major gaps in the implementation and enforcement of our nature laws is leaving nature dangerously exposed to serious threats from the development of hydropower. Europe's rivers are already saturated with more than 25,000 hydropower plants. Hydropower dams fragment rivers, destroy wetlands and, as a consequence, threaten the species that depend on them for their habitat and survival. They also block fish migration routes and trap sediments. The construction of additional hydropower plants would exacerbate the negative impacts that already exist and therefore contradict both the conservation objectives of freshwater habitats protected under Natura 2000 and the objectives of the Water Framework Directive.



SAVE THE DRAVA RIVER, CROATIA



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Spanning Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia, the lower courses of the Drava and Mura Rivers and related sections of the Danube are among Europe's most ecologically important riverine areas – the so-called “Amazon of Europe”. The Mura-Drava-Danube has been nominated to be the world's [first 5 country UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve](#).

The Drava River, running through Croatia in the heart of the Amazon of Europe, had been threatened by plans to develop two more hydropower plants, Molve 1 and Molve 2 in Koprivnica-križevci County bordering with Hungary. The location of the proposed hydropower plants were in the only free flowing part of the Drava River, where it is in its most natural state, with many gravel bars, steep banks, side arms and alluvial forests. It hosts the last breeding pairs of little terns on the Drava River in Croatia. Furthermore, Drava's floodplains are an important habitat for black storks, white-tailed eagles, sand martins, and starlets. The site is therefore designated as a Natura 2000 site under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives (BHD). New hydropower plants in the protected area would have significantly impacted the Natura 2000 site and the protected species and habitats it entails.

In March 2019, following a public consultation and a year-long campaign to save the Drava River from hydropower plants organised by WWF, the Koprivnica-Križevci County listened to NGOs and the public. It was announced there would be no new hydropower constructions on the Drava River – success!

Or so it seemed.

A mere 4 months later, in July 2019 the Croatian parliament slipped in a worrying last minute amendment to the new Water Act. This amendment would allow destructive activities for the purposes of flood defence and navigation to proceed without proper environmental assessment. This violates both the BHD and the EU Water Framework Directive. This loophole in the law leaves the Drava River and all other Croatian rivers exposed to illegal and environmentally damaging development.

¹ [January 2019, 'Joint Policy Brief on the Implementation and Enforcement of the Birds & Habitats Directives'](#)

**The next European Commission must ensure the Croatian government withdraws the amendment to the new Water Act and ensure all Member States follow the Drava River example:
No new hydropower plants in Natura 2000 sites.**

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The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the European Commission and the MAVA Foundation for this publication. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and cannot be regarded as reflecting the position of the funders mentioned above. The funder cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information this document contains.

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