

Chilean financial press reports cancellation of second-largest hydro project in Chile, citing Futaleufú Riverkeeper and local opposition as reasons

SANTIAGO, Chile, 10/23/2014 –Chile’s financial press is reporting that Endesa, a multinational company which currently owns the water rights to the Futaleufú River and had planned to build three large dams, has removed the project from its energy portfolio. However, Endesa continues to own the water rights to the Futaleufú and several other rivers in Chile, and fears remain among environmental advocates that the project will be restarted or sold to another energy company unless the river is permanently protected.

The news in Chile’s Diario Financiero follows previous comments by Endesa Chile’s parent company, Enersis, which acknowledged the strong level of opposition by Futaleufú Riverkeeper and the community. Last June, following comments in the Chilean press by Waterkeeper Alliance President Robert F. Kennedy Jr, an Enersis director admitted that the proposed dams “have awoken the attention of environmental groups, and any proposed project there would encounter disapproval from members of the community.” Experts also believe the historical grassroots campaign known as Patagonia Sin Represas (Patagonia Without Dams) played a significant role in Endesa’s decision to shelve the project. The campaign involves participation from over 70 organizations, including Futaleufú Riverkeeper.

Futaleufú Riverkeeper’s executive director, Chilean environmental attorney Robert Currie, remains concerned about the news, citing water rights and mining claims which have been filed in the watershed. “While it’s good news to see Endesa backing down temporarily from their plans to destroy the Futaleufú, nothing is stopping Endesa from reviving the project in the future or selling the water rights to another company interested in doing so. Until the water rights are out of the hands of private companies, both the watershed and the communities who depend on it will remain in danger. We must continue to be vigilant in calling upon the Chilean government, citizens, and the international community to permanently protect this irreplaceable natural resource.”

While a cause for celebration in the ongoing fight to save Chile’s wild and scenic rivers, several partner organizations also expressed caution about the news. Juan Pablo Orrego, president of Chilean NGO Ecosistemas and a board member of International Rivers, commented that “it would be horrible if [Endesa] were to sell the water rights to AES Gener or Colbun, even though it does appear they view the Futa as untouchable for several reasons.” Ecosistemas played a significant role in stopping the HidroAysén project, working together with a coalition of organizations known as the Patagonia Defense Council. Mr. Orrego also stated that Endesa’s decision “creates a space for discussion” about water rights in Chile.

Those who are in Santiago this week will have the opportunity to hear from both Mr. Currie and Mr. Orrego this Friday evening, October 24, as part of the SANFIC film festival, following the Chilean premiere of the award-winning documentary DamNation. The film will be screened at Cine Hoyts in the La Reina neighborhood of Santiago at 8pm.

Futaleufú Riverkeeper is a Chilean nonprofit foundation dedicated to protecting the Futaleufú watershed and its communities. www.futaleufuriverkeeper.org

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