

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats



Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 112 (2004) of the Standing Committee on hydroelectric dams at Kárahnjúkar and Nordlingaalda (Iceland)

(adopted by the Standing Committee on 3 December 2004)

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats;

Recalling that under Article 3, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Convention, the Parties agree that “*Each Contracting Party shall take steps to promote national policies for the conservation of wild flora, wild fauna and natural habitats, with particular attention to endangered and vulnerable species, especially endemic ones, and endangered habitats, in accordance with the provisions of this Convention*” and that “*Each Contracting Party undertakes, in its planning and development policies and in its measures against pollution, to have regard to the conservation of wild flora and fauna*”;

Recalling that under Article 4 of the Convention each Contracting Party shall take appropriate and necessary legislative and administrative measures to ensure the conservation of the habitats of the wild flora and fauna species, especially those specified in Appendices I and II, and the conservation of endangered natural habitats;

Recalling that Article 4 of the Convention stipulates that the Contracting Parties in their planning and development policies shall have regard to the conservation requirements of the areas protected under the preceeding paragraph, so as to avoid or minimise as far as possible any deterioration of such areas;

Recalling the *Recommendation (2002) 96 of the Standing Committee, on conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, specially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland*, and the European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species developed by the Bern Convention;

Referring to the other Convention provisions regarding the protection of habitats and conservation of species;

Referring to the report of Mr Joe Sultana drawn up following his on-the-spot appraisal [document T-PVS/Files (2004) 5];

Concluding that no Bern Convention species will be seriously affected by the Kárahnjúkar and Nordlingaalda projects and that there is no need to open a case file on this issue;

Considering that the sites concerned by the hydropower projects contain species and habitats of European importance listed in the Appendices to the Convention, in particular, the internationally important population of the Pink-footed-goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*), the Greylag goose (*Anser anser*), the Arctic skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) and the Great skua (*Catharacta skua*), as well as the Harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*);

Noting that the hydropower projects are motivated by the policy of the Icelandic Government to promote increased utilisation of renewable energy resources in harmony with the environment and noting the positive achievement that about 70% of all energy consumption in Iceland comes from renewable sources;

Desirous to reduce and compensate the negative impacts that the hydropower projects are likely to have on biodiversity and recognising the importance of functioning ecosystems, and the significance of habitat integrity in maintaining biodiversity, and over the long term enabling adaptation to climate change;

Noting that both the Kárahnjúkar and Nordlingaalda projects are part of a first phase of a larger Icelandic hydro and geothermal energy Master Plan encompassing nearly fifty potential hydropower projects;

Noting that both projects have been evaluated with respect to their impact on nature, cultural heritage, alternate land-use potential, economic gain and regional development, in full accordance with national environmental legislation and international obligations, including the provisions of the Bern Convention;

Noting that the Kárahnjúkar hydropower project has been given the go-ahead by the authorities and work is in progress; noting also that the proposed Nordlingaalda hydropower dam has been temporarily postponed;

Recommends that the Government of Iceland:

1. Address cumulative negative effects on Bern Convention species while conducting a strategic environmental impact assessment in accordance with the European Community SEA Directive (2001/42/EC), based on the Master Plan for hydro and geothermal energy resources;
2. Recognising the value of the monitoring board established under the Kárahnjúkar hydropower project, consider the establishment of a similar process for appropriate hydro and geothermal projects that are approved and implemented, ensuring that these processes are effective and transparent, addressing negative impacts and in compliance with imposed conditions;

Relating to Kárahnjúkar hydropower project:

3. Avoid disturbance and pressures in the area of Eyjabakkar Important Bird Area (IBA) by restricting access during the moulting period of the Pink-footed goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*). Furthermore, take appropriate measures to ensure that favourable conservation status of the area is maintained;
4. Maintain a favourable conservation status of the Úthérad to ensure the ornithological integrity of this IBA;
5. Consider wetland restoration in the Úthérad IBA to compensate for negative impacts resulting from the project;

Relating to Nordlingaalda hydropower dam (Thjórsárver):

6. Maintain the favourable conservation status of the Thjórsárver to ensure the ecological integrity of this ecosystem and protect against significant negative impacts that may arise as a result of energy projects.