

The CEE Bankwatch Network, a non-governmental organisation based in the Czech Republic, said on Wednesday that eight hydropower plant projects in Albania, Croatia and Macedonia financed with European public money have damaged biodiversity and should carry out restoration measures.

The Ilovac HPP in Croatia, the Rapuni 1-2 and Ternove HPPs in Albania, and five plants in Macedonia - Brajcinska reka 1, Brajcinska reka 2, Tresonecka reka, Lipkovo and Tearce 97-99 - are affecting endemic and endangered species, and in some cases they have also hampered the local communities' water use, CEE Bankwatch said, citing the results of a study.

The plants were built in 2013-2015 with support from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank, it added.

According to Bankwatch, the HPPs are blocking fish passes, releasing insufficient or no water at all downstream, and creating significant erosion with access roads. "...these projects have caused the destruction of habitat of the endemic Prespa Trout in Macedonia and the filling of the glacial Black Lake in Albania with sediment, among other impacts," Bankwatch commented.

"Our research shows that so-called small hydropower plants have large impacts. It is high time for financiers to stop investing in any industrial activity in ecologically sensitive areas," Igor Vejnovic, Bankwatch's hydropower policy officer and the author of the study, is quoted saying.

The network said it expects the banks to introduce no-go zones for financing hydropower in line with the recommendations of the International Union for Conservation of Nature .

It also recommended that the European Commission play an enhanced role by assisting the countries to adopt and implement the EU Water Framework Directive and Birds and Habitats Directives in order to improve strategic river management in the region and help countries to avoid excessive pressure on rivers.

The Czech Republic-based CEE Bankwatch Network is the largest network of grassroots, environmental and human rights groups in central and eastern Europe.

Source: renewablesnow