

The Government of Slovenia said the public interest outweighs nature conservation in the case of the proposed hydropower project in Mokrice, under development by state-owned company Hidroelektrarne na spodnji Savi - HESS.

Hydropower plant Mokrice will be an important factor in the green transition in Slovenia, Hidroelektrarne na spodnji Savi said after the government backed the project. The investor will still need to implement all the measures recommended in the environmental impact study and the proposals by the Slovenian Native Fish Society, according to the decision. The government said the public interest in the case is more important than nature conservation in the case as long as the company sticks to the procedure with regard to environmental protection. It told HESS, part of state-owned GEN Group, to secure fish spawning grounds and passage for aquatic organisms and monitor the impact.

HESS must restore, maintain natural habitats

The country's Administrative Court blocked the project in December 2020, after the Slovenian Native Fish Society challenged the government's initial decision, which was issued within the procedure for obtaining the construction permit.

The 28 MW hydropower plant was initially planned to be completed in 2018

HESS now needs to sustainably manage the lower Sava river and its Krka estuary in the area and introduce the Danube gudgeon, also known as steingressling (*Gobio uranoscopus*) in line with the rules for Natura 2000 sites.

"In the current energy situation, when we depend on foreign energy sources, every new production facility is even more important for Slovenia's energy independence. After all, HPP Mokrice will be able to supply more than 30,000 households with affordable and reliable electricity without the risk of speculative price fluctuations," the company said. It added the project includes comprehensive flood protection measures and the restoration and preservation of natural habitats.

Mokrice to be last unit in HESS's hydropower cascade

HESS applied for a building permit for the 28 MW Mokrice hydropower plant in June 2020. The company already runs hydropower plants Boštanj, Blanca, Krško and Brežice in the lower Sava cascade, which is planned to have six units.

Hydropower plant Mokrice, which was supposed to be completed in 2018, is the last in the row. The site is near the border with Croatia. Brežice, which has a capacity of 47.4 MW, was commissioned in 2017.

The European Union has urged member states to accelerate the permitting process for renewables, especially wind and solar power projects, in a push to end the reliance on

Russian fossil fuels as soon as possible. The proposed REPowerEU package of measures and funding enhances the climate ambitions set out under the European Green Deal and the NextGenerationEU emergency spending program of more than EUR 800 billion for a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the plan also envisages an increase in the use of fossil fuels in the short term, Balkan Green Energy writes.