



# FACTSHEET

## GIVING A DAM: HOW HYDROPOWER IS DESTROYING EUROPE'S RIVERS



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## SMALL HYDROPOWER DEVELOPMENT

### ON THE PETIT TABUC RIVER

#### FRANCE

The Petit Tabuc stream, in the Alpine department of Hautes-Alpes, has a very good status according to the Water Framework Directive, yet is threatened by the construction of a small hydropower plant. This small hydropower plant could downgrade the status of the stream and is opposed by many NGOs. The plant would receive a tariff on the sale of electricity for at least 20 years.

### INCONSISTENCIES OF THE PROJECT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

The Petit Tabuc valley, topped by glaciers and surrounded by age-old forests, has thriving biodiversity and an immense landscape value. The site is located on the edge of the core zone of the Ecrins National Park and two Natura 2000 sites.

The stream is classified as having a very good status. The Petit Tabuc was supposed to be classified for the protection of such fish under national law [1]. The rivers on this list have to be protected from any threat. However, this ultimately did not happen as a new strategic project for the region was being envisaged.

The Petit Tabuc is a tributary of the larger Guisane River and ensures the biological continuity of its aquatic ecosystem. According to local NGOs, the hydropower project goes against the River Basin Management Plan because it does not preserve the recognised functionalities of the Guisane as a "biological reservoir of particular value". Moreover, a report by the Environmental Regional Authority [2] pointed out significant shortcomings in the

### HYDROPOWER DEVELOPMENT IN FRANCE

In 2018, the overall French hydropower infrastructure consisted of approximately 2 500 plants, totalling an installed capacity of 25.5 GW. It includes about 400 hydropower concessions representing 90% of the overall power and 2,100 small plants (installed capacity < 4.5 MW) representing 10% of the overall installed capacity.

Since 2016, the small plants can benefit from one of the two types of financial support: the feed-in tariffs (plants < 500kW) or the premium on electricity sales, notably granted to the plants between 0.5 and 4.5 MW. The Petit Tabuc plant, which has a capacity just below 500 kW, is eligible to a feed-in tariff of approximately 130€/MWh.

environmental study that supported the authorisation given in 2000, notably:

- The study, which includes the appropriate assessment required for Natura 2000 sites under the Habitats directive, is incomplete and should be revised to comply with Article R.122-5 of the Environmental Code.
- The study is incomplete as regards biological corridors and reservoirs, the ecological functions of habitats and species, and wetlands.
- The Natura 2000 appropriate assessment is limited to one paragraph. There is a mention of an impact notice attached to the file, but this notice is not provided. The limited elements presented make it impossible to conclude that this project will not impact the habitats and species that justified the classification of the Natura 2000 sites in the vicinity of the stream.
- The presentation of the cumulative impact with other existing or approved projects is not addressed. Additional points are raised, such as doubts about the value of the in-stream flow.
- The study ignores the decrease in the river's inflow due to climate change.

## LITTLE ELECTRICITY, BIG PROFITS

The plant's capacity was designed to be just below 0.5 MW so that the project could be eligible for the feed-in tariff and get the highest electricity sale price possible for 20 years. Thanks to the feed-in tariff, it would receive public aid to the amount of € 2.9 m over 20 years. This represents a little less than six million euros/MW of electricity over 20 years. [3]

## ONGOING APPEAL PROCEDURES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Citizens and NGOs have mobilised to protect the Petit Tabuc, advocating against the project. In addition to the shortcomings in the environmental study and the limited benefits in terms of electricity production, they point out the omission of data linked to the value of the area for tourism. The site is known as the most beautiful access to the Ecrins Park in the valley and is popular with hikers. [4] Six civil society associations together have filed two appeals, one against the environmental authorisation and the other against the declaration of public interest. Procedures are currently ongoing. [5]

## CONCLUSIONS

Although a legal procedure is still ongoing, evidence suggests that the decision to allocate feed-in tariffs to the Petit Tabuc hydropower plant was based on incomplete environmental studies and that the project runs counter to the River Basin Management Plan.

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[1] Environmental Code, article L214-17, List 1. Avis de la Mission

[2] Avis de la Mission Régionale d'Autorité environnementale de Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur sur le projet de microcentrale sur le torrent du Petit Tabuc sur la commune du Monétier-les-Bains, 2019.

[3] Jacques Pulou, [Collectif Haut-Alpin pour la protection des torrents alpins](#), March 2021.

[4] <http://sauvonslepetittabuc.blogspot.com/2019/07/repondre-lenquete-publique-est-urgent.html>

[5] <https://www.ledauphine.com/environnement/2021/02/28/brianconnais-la-microcentrale-au-petit-tabuc-fait-des-re-mous-en-justice>



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