

Vietnam: Lawmakers call for review of proposed dams

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National Assembly deputies from southern Dong Nai Province have called for a renewed Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) report prepared for two controversial power plants intended to be built in the southern province.

Historian Duong Trung Quoc said there were many conflicts among scientists, local authorities, investors of the proposed projects and an institute that was hired by the investors to prepare an EIA report.

The reassessment for the proposed projects, called 6 and 6A, should be done by a qualified international agency to be viewed as objective, he said.

The 6 and 6A dams, invested in by the Duc Long Gia Lai Company, are expected to flood 418.5ha of forestland in the Cat Tien National Park and its buffer zone.

Last year, the investor submitted its proposal with the EIAs done by experts from an irrigation institute but these were soon exposed as flawed and containing wrong information.

After strong criticism from scientists, the media and the public, the company hired the Institute of Environment and Natural Resources to prepare a new EIA report, which has been submitted to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for consideration.

However, several officials, scientists and leading public citizens have questioned the information in the new EIA and cast doubts on its objectivity.

Early this month, Viet Nam River Network, a local NGO, sent a petition to the ministry, pointing out essential elements that the new EIA report failed to include or clarify.

It said construction of the dams would violate the nation's Law on Biodiversity and that actual forestland lost in construction would be much higher than estimated in the EIA report.

"Solutions for conserving forest resources and biodiversity mentioned in the EIA report are impractical and there will be no basis for implementation," the petition said.

Another problem was the transmission system that would be built for the projects. The system would run along the national park, further threatening its fragile ecosystem and biodiversity.

Le Viet Hung, director of the Dong Nai Department of Natural Resources and Environment, said he doubted the EIA report's claim that there would be no impact on biodiversity or the water flow of the Dong Nai River in the lower reaches if the dams are built.

He also expressed concern about the fate of rare species in the Cat Tien National Park that were listed in national and global Red Books.

Meanwhile, Nguyen Van Dien, director of the park and a staunch opponent of the projects, noted that the park was being considered for recognition as a world natural heritage by the UNESCO.

Furthermore, the Ramsar Convention for wetlands conservation has recognized the Bau Sau Crocodile Pond that was home to thousands of Indochine crocodiles, he said.

Scientists have estimated that if the projects are approved, the production of each megawatt of electricity would cost 1.34ha of forestland.

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