

Brazil's hard won reputation on forest protection now in Senate's hands

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Brasilia, Brazil: Brazil's reputation as a country that is serious about preventing deforestation and minimising climate change is in the hands of the country's Senate and president, following parliamentary approval of sweeping reductions to forest protection last night.

"These changes are not in the interest of Brazilian society, and nature, go against Brazilian national and international commitments, and put climate stability at great risk," said WWF-Brazil Conservation Director Carlos Alberto de Mattos Scaramuzza.

"For the narrow economic benefit of particular private interests, Brazil's National Assembly is proposing to cast aside the basis of our country's remarkable and much praised achievements in reducing the rates of deforestation.

"The dramatic surge in deforestation rates that has occurred just in anticipation of this law shows the sort of destruction that Brazil is looking at if the changes to the Forest Code pass the Senate and are accepted by the president."

Brazil's protection against erosion and devastating floods

Drastically cut back in the proposed new Forest Code are the "areas de preservacao permanente - APP(s) or permanent preservation areas) that protect forest and other ecosystems in the most sensitive areas, alongside rivers, on steep slopes and elevated watersheds.

"This is Brazil's protection for water tables and biological corridors and against erosion, and devastating floods," said Scaramuzza.

Other "set-asides" ("reserva florestal - RF), which offered a basis for sustainable use of forests and avoiding climate change causing emissions, have also been greatly cut back.

"As the proposed changes were approved last night, these provisions for the protection of sensitive areas will be reduced, with thinner bands along rivers and smaller properties of up to 400 hectares not being required to keep the "set-asides possibly just a first step in even more drastic



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Amazonian rainforest being burnt to create pasture for ranching, Brazil.

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wind-downs of forest protection," said Scaramuzza.

"In what is possibly one of the great motivations for this assault on the forest code, protection is to be taken from the forests and given to state governors who are susceptible to political pressures. More than this, requirements to restore some illegally deforested areas will be dropped. "

Brazil's States are also to be given the right to further wind back the regulations protecting forests.

Senate more likely to uphold Brazilian achievement

"WWF-Brasil expects that the Brazilian Senate will be more likely to represent the legitimate interests of Brazilian society, and the role of Brazil in the community of Nations," said Scaramuzza. "Brazil's new President Dilma Roussef is also not going to wish to squander the reputation of her predecessor, or to be the host of the approaching Rio+20 international environmental summit with these shameful changes wreaking havoc across the Amazon."

"The vote at the House of Representatives was one of the steps," said WWF-Brazil CEO Denise Hamú, "WWF-Brazil remains engaged to lobby with the Senate, the next step in this process. We hope that the Senate elects a rapporteur who will live up to the complexity and sensitivity of this issue, and who is competent and unbiased.

"We will also keep society engaged, and we are confident that President Dilma Roussef will exercise her power of veto if necessary, in order to fulfil her commitments to the Brazilian society regarding environmental protection and to the international community regarding the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity conservation.

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