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[Brazil's Surge of Environmental Threats Reaches New Heights](#)

ALERT member Philip Fearnside, arguably the world's leading expert on Amazon conservation and development, gives us an update on alarming developments in Brazil.

The power of Brazil's "ruralist" block, which represents agribusiness in the country's National Congress, has reached new heights with the recent surge of proposed laws and constitutional amendments aimed at gutting the environmental licensing system.

A bonanza of opportunities to slip environmentally damaging proposals past legislative hurdles was provided by political turmoil before and after the recent impeachment proceedings that removed President Dilma Rousseff (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

New Threats

The power of the ruralists has continued to grow even beyond its previous height, and new threats are surfacing right and left.



A proposed constitutional amendment ([PEC-65/2012](#)) that would effectively eliminate environmental licensing continues to progress to a Senate vote under “urgent” status. This would make the mere submission of an environmental impact study an

automatic authorization for constructing any major infrastructure project, making any analysis by Brazil's environmental agency (IBAMA) merely token.

Proposed bills in the Senate ([PLS-654/2015](#)) and Chamber of Deputies ([PL-3,729/2004](#)) also are proceeding under “urgent” status. These would abbreviate the process of licensing and set an impossible deadline for IBAMA to approve any license, after which the proposed project would be automatically authorized.

Backroom Tactics

A dramatic example of the surprising nature of such proposals occurred in September 2016, when a sweeping bill for a "Program for Partnerships for Investment" (PPI) suddenly appeared (Law 13.334/2016) and was approved by the National Congress and then sanctioned by the new Brazilian President, Michael Temer, the next day.

Debate in the Senate plenary was limited to three opposition speakers -- but was a meaningless farce because under “urgent” status the party positions had been set and nothing said could change the votes.

This new law gives the PPI Executive Board power to override both IBAMA and Brazil's national agency for indigenous peoples (FUNAI), as well as all state and municipal agencies. With this unprecedented new law already approved, we can only wait in trepidation to see how the PPI progresses.

It doesn't stop there. In December a series of proposals suddenly appeared to authorize three industrial waterways, including one on the Tapajós and Teles Pires Rivers in southeastern Amazonia, that would involve flooding Munduruku indigenous land. The [key Senate committee vote](#) on these proposals has been delayed until the Senate reconvenes next month.



Scary Implications

The waterway proposal, as well as the various proposals to gut environmental licensing, would have permanent and irreparable impacts in Brazil.

They also relate to a proposed series of dams on the Tapajós River and its tributaries in Amazonia, including the [São Luiz do Tapajós Dam](#) that would partially flood the proposed Sawré Muybu indigenous land. The ruralist block is attempting to [block the indigenous land proposal](#), which was made by former President Rousseff.

Pressure to build this Amazon mega-dam is very strong, with support coming from big building contractors, energy interests, and the agribusiness sector, including the current Minister of Agriculture, Blairo Maggi. Maggi is the largest producer of soybeans in Brazil, and his massive soy exports would be benefited by the dam and one of its [associated waterways](#).

These are frightening times in Brazil. With the economy in recession, conservative political forces [are aligning](#) to scrap critical environmental and social safeguards that could expose Brazil and much of the Amazon to truly serious perils.



[January 05, 2017 / Philip Fearnside](#)

[Brazil](#), [Amazon](#), [Philip Fearnside](#), [Brazilian Senate](#), [Brazilian Congress](#), [hydroelectric dams](#), [Michael Temer](#), [Sao Luiz do Tapajos Dam](#), [Sawre Maybu indigenous land](#), [Blairo Maggi](#), [soy](#), [IBAMA](#), [FUNAI](#), [indigenous people](#), [deforestation](#), ["ruralist" block](#), [constitutional amendments](#), [environmental licensing](#)
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