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World Bank tells Brazil: "fast-track Amazon dams"

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There was a time when Brazil's groundbreaking environmental laws, based upon its constitution ([article 225](http://www.v-brazil.com/government/laws/titleVIII.html) (<http://www.v-brazil.com/government/laws/titleVIII.html>)) which guarantees its citizens the right to a healthy environment were considered a global model. Not anymore.

Now, the World Bank has joined the chorus of disaffected developers in attacking Brazil's environmental licensing process for hydroelectric dams as an "obstacle to development".

In a new report issued in March, "Environmental Licensing of Hydroelectric Projects in Brazil: Contributing to the Debate" ([available in Portuguese](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLACBRAZILINPOR/Resources/Brazil_licenciamento_SintesePortugueseMarch2008.pdf) (http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLACBRAZILINPOR/Resources/Brazil_licenciamento_SintesePortugueseMarch2008.pdf)), the Bank denounces delays in approving new dams, and the resulting anxiety this process causes for private investors.

Ignoring energy alternatives, the Bank focuses on the urgency to exploit the Amazon's hydroelectric potential, where controversial projects face complex social and environmental issues, and draw broad opposition from civil society groups. It also excoriates the Public Attorney's office, which it says has "unlimited" independence to bring lawsuits blocking dam projects.

As recommendations for resolving licensing problems, the Bank advocates prior application of [strategic environmental assessments](http://www.sea-info.net/) (<http://www.sea-info.net/>) and river basin studies, which it says could pre-determine the feasibility of multiple projects in a given river basin, even before detailed environmental studies of each planned project take place. Recognizing there will be conflicts, the study recommends adoption of measures for conflict resolution, including high-level independent panels for projects with high social or environmental risks, measures consist with the Bank's own [policies on environmental assessment](http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/Institutional/Manuals/OpManual.nsf/toc2/9367A2A9D9DAEED38525672C007D0972?OpenDocument) (<http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/Institutional/Manuals/OpManual.nsf/toc2/9367A2A9D9DAEED38525672C007D0972?OpenDocument>).

What purports to be a profound look at environmental licensing in Brazil turns out to be nothing more than one more wildly aimed volley intended to lay to rest any possibility of taking an objective look at the feasibility of proposed dam projects. Clearly, the World Bank intends to play a more central role in the future in promoting the damming of the rivers of Amazonia.