

## The intrinsic value of Aysén and Chilean Patagonia El valor intrínseco de Aysén y la Patagonia chilena

By Patricio Rodrigo



No one doubts that the world is entering a new era. There are numerous signs, from our own natural world, such as climate change, to our culture, with the emergence of social movements and the new "springs" in diverse countries around the world.

In Chile, the defense of Patagonia against plans for dams like HidroAysén has marked a before and after in political campaigns and environmental struggles. The massive marches of May 2011 in Santiago, cities across Chile, and worldwide helped put environmental and energy issues high on the public agenda. Seventy-five percent of Chileans now support the cause of the "Patagonia Without Dams" campaign and its opposition to dams in Aysén.

Chileans and citizens around the world have a special affection for Patagonia and defend it utilizing their own experiences, abilities, values or convictions. This commitment is even greater among those who have visited and experienced the pristine nature of this region with its breathtaking landscapes and friendly people.

This ability to excite people and increase their sensitivity to the environment, is an intrinsic value of nature in Patagonia that soaks the soul of citizens of the 21st century. Is this because it is the largest reserve of pure water in the world? Because it is a Reserve of Life? Or because it puts human beings in its real dimension of being part of and not owner of something so sublime? There are many questions, nevertheless every day there are more visitors to Aysén and Chilean Patagonia, representing all nationalities, and searching for unique experiences to enjoy the virgin environment and grow as people and citizens who are called to protect the planet.

Goals are set by society, said Albert Einstein, adding as well that politics, science and technology should act as the instruments to reach those goals and not impose their special interests. Chile and the world have defined a goal for Patagonia: nature conservation and sustainability in its development process.

Chilean environmentalists, along with organizations part of the Social Roundtable for a New Chile, have proposed the following: "Grant Chilean Patagonia, defined as territory extending from the Llanquihue and Cochamó areas to the south, through a specific law, a protection status for its envi-

ronmental and cultural heritage, declaring it as a Reserve of Life, a Reserve of Water for Climate Change and Sustainability Zone, excluding energy or mining megaprojects, and respecting the regional goals determined by their social actors, such as tourism, environmental services, cleaner production and establishing the regional certification of environmental quality."

These proposals for the future demonstrate how Chilean citizens appreciate the intrinsic value of Chilean Patagonia, its natural heritage with a territory that is practically unexplored, with more than 46,000 miles of coastline, filled with glaciers, ice fields, undiscovered fjords, indomitable peaks and where man occupies less than 10 percent of the land and with its own unique culture that adds even greater value to Patagonia.

However, in addition to this essential value, Aysén has great economic value for the growing demand for tourism and new residents that require land to begin their business ventures and personal projects. HidroAysén would cause significant damage to this regional economy. The University of Chile, using data from 2008, calculated a net loss of more than 40 million dollars per year caused by a decrease in tourism if HidroAysén is built and 500 million dollars in losses throughout the 12 years needed to construct HidroAysén. On the other hand, Professor Fernando Salamanca estimated that if the region moves in a direction and acts to expand the tourism industry, there is a potential profit of 1.15 billion dollars per year. According to the University of Concepción, the destruction of the scenic landscape caused by just building the first of the five dams planned for the Baker and Pascua rivers would amount to a loss of 210 million dollars, according to the University of Concepción.

Given both the intrinsic value and its economic potential, the Aysén region deserves a different future than the one being pushed by the controlling electric monopolies, of which HidroAysén is the Hydro of Lerna with its many heads.

Everyone must get involved if we are to achieve a Patagonia without dams. Support us at [www.patagoniasinrepresas.com](http://www.patagoniasinrepresas.com).

**Patricio Rodrigo is executive secretary of Patagonia Without Dams.**

UNDER THREAT: the Baker River / BAJO AMENAZA: el río Baker



hue and Cochamó al Sur, mediante una Ley específica, un estatus de protección a su patrimonio ambiental y cultural, declarándola como Reserva de Vida, Reserva de Agua frente al Cambio Climático y Zona de Sustentabilidad, excluyendo megaproyectos energéticos y/o mineros, respetando las vocaciones territoriales decididas por sus actores sociales, como el turismo, los servicios ambientales, la producción limpia y estableciendo la certificación territorial de la calidad ambiental".

Estas propuestas de futuro demuestran cómo aprecian los ciudadanos chilenos el valor intrínseco de la Patagonia chilena, patrimonio natural de un territorio prácticamente inexplorado, con más de 74 mil kilómetros de borde costero, llenos de glaciares y campos de hielo, de fiordos desconocidos, cumbres indómitas y donde el hombre habita en menos del 10% del territorio, con una cultura propia que le da aún más valor.

Sin embargo, además de ese valor esencial, Aysén tiene un gran valor económico por la demanda creciente de turismo y de nuevos habitantes que requieren terrenos donde instalar sus proyectos económicos y de vida. El daño que causaría HidroAysén a la economía regional es significativo, la Universidad de Chile con datos del año 2008 calculó pérdidas netas por más de 40 millones de dólares al año por menor afluencia de turistas y 500 millones de dólares en los doce años de su eventual construcción. También el profesor Fernando Salamanca, estimó que la Región tiene un potencial de ingreso turístico anual, si desarrolla sus capacidades, por sobre los 1.150 millones de dólares al año. Solo la destrucción del paisaje que occasionaría la represa Baker 1, tendría un valor estimado, según la Universidad de Concepción, de 210 millones de dólares.

Esto demuestra que tanto por los valores intrínsecos, como por el potencial económico, Aysén se merece un futuro diferente al que desean los controladores monopolios eléctricos, de las cuales HidroAysén es como la Hidra de Lerna, con sus múltiples cabezas.

Todos somos necesarios para lograr una Patagonia sin Represas. Apóyanos en [www.patagoniasinrepresas.com](http://www.patagoniasinrepresas.com).

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