

SAVE Brazil calls upon the President to veto 'retrograde' changes to forest law

Title

Brazil's lower parliament has passed a batch of reforms to the existing forest code, which BirdLife Partner SAVE Brazil has called "a monster which will have significant impact over deforestation for the next 50 years". The reforms ease restrictions on clearing forests along rivers and on hilltops, and provide amnesties for small landholders who illegally cut down forest prior to 2008. "This is a truly a huge loss and disappointment to all of us, who have been fighting against the changes," said SAVE Brazil's Director, Dr Jaqueline Goerck. "We wrote a technical article arguing against the changes, which was published and sent to the government. All data shows that the old code was appropriate, with minor changes needed." The changes are also opposed by Brazil's current and former Ministers of the Environment. Jaqueline Goerck says the unification of such a group from various political parties towards a single objective is without precedent in Brazil. All ten of the people who have held this post since the Ministry was created have sent a letter to President Dilma and to members of Congress, urging them to reject the reforms, which they describe as a "retrograde step". They say the code "has been the single most relevant institutional basis for the protection afforded to forests and all the other forms of natural vegetation in Brazil, as well as protecting the biodiversity associated with them, the water resources they protect, and the ecological services that they provide." And they add: "The mere expectation that the amendment to the Forest Law and its consequent weakening would be approved set off a disturbing wave of renewed deforestation in the Amazon region, as has been unequivocally demonstrated by data recently released by the Brazilian Space Research Institute (INPE)." "We are absolutely perplexed with this outcome of the vote. 430 deputies voted yes and only 63 voted against the changes," said Jaqueline Goerck. The approved document will now go to the Senate for evaluation. "If approved, the president can veto the articles that she is against, and if the Senate does not approve the text, it goes back to the first instance of the parliament for new decision. If our president Dilma Roussef vetoes the most damaging articles, as she said she would, I will admire her for her courage and good sense." Dr Goerck added: "We always thought that the new generations would be better than our ancestors, but with this horrible example, the new generations will lower their parameters of nature conservation. Before, we at least had the argument that, "even if you really don't understand why you need to protect mountaintops, riverine forests and slopes with forest cover you cannot deforest these areas because it is against the law". Now this is potentially legal. And what about the floods, the catastrophic mountain slides that killed thousands of people who occupied such areas

illegally? Now this could actually be legal??