



Strasbourg, 18 February 2025

T-PVS/Files(2025)2016-5_gov

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

45th meeting

Strasbourg, 8-12 December 2025

Bureau of the Standing Committee

8-10 April 2025

Strasbourg

Open file: 2016/5

**Presumed negative impact of developments on the Vjosa
river including hydro-power plant development and Vlora
International Airport(Albania)**

- GOVERNMENT REPORT -

*Document prepared by
The Ministry of Tourism and Environment*



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA
MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENT

Tirana February 14, 2025

To: Mr. Mikaël Poutiers
Secretary of the Bern Convention
Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France

Subject: Case – file report on the response to “Complaint No. 2016/05: Open File: Albania: Presumed negative impact of developments on the Vjosa river including hydro-power plant development and Vlora International Airport

Dear Mr. Poutiers,

With the reference to the Standing Committee Decision of the Bern Convention at its 44th meeting of December 2024 considering “Complaint No. 2016/05: Open File: Albania: Presumed negative impact of developments on the Vjosa river including hydro-power plant development and Vlora International Airport”, where the government was invited to submit a progress report including the 11 point of Recommendation No. 2019 (2023) as the basis for their reporting, please find below the requested one:

The Government of Albania reaffirm their full commitment to the principles of the Bern Convention, ensuring that environmental protection and sustainable development remain top priorities. In this regard we would like to present the latest developments regarding the Vjosa River National Park, the Vlora International Airport project, and the Law on Protected Areas.

Since the submission of the last report in July 2024, the Albanian Government has successfully completed the Integrated Management Plan (IMP) for Vjosa River National Park (NP) approved by Minister of Tourism and Environment Order no. 342 date 23.09.2024 (annex 1). This document has now been formally approved and is under full implementation, ensuring that the highest standards of protection are in place for the Vjosa ecosystem.

The IMP guarantees:

- Permanent protection of Vjosa River and its tributaries, reinforcing the ban on all hydropower projects and major infrastructure developments.
- Sustainable management practices, ensuring that tourism, agriculture, and local economic activities align with conservation priorities.
- Regular biodiversity monitoring and ecological research programs to assess potential environmental threats and ensure evidence-based conservation strategies.

- Effective enforcement mechanisms, with designated rangers and oversight structures to prevent illegal activities within the park.

Furthermore, Albania has officially submitted the dossier for the recognition of Vjosa Valley as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve under the Man and Biosphere (MAB) Program. This submission marks a historic step towards reinforcing the region's international recognition and conservation status. The designation as a Biosphere Reserve will:

- Strengthen regional and international collaboration on conservation and scientific research.
- Support local sustainable development initiatives, benefiting communities while preserving biodiversity.
- Provide an additional legal framework to prevent environmentally damaging projects in the future.

These two major achievements represent a firm commitment by the Albanian Government to the long-term preservation of the Vjosa ecosystem in full alignment with international conservation agreements.

The Albanian Government recognizes the ongoing concerns regarding the Vlora International Airport project and remains committed to ensuring that its construction and operation adhere to the highest environmental protection standards. The latest environmental verification reports confirm that:

- Mitigation measures have been strictly applied to minimize any potential ecological impact on the Narta Lagoon.
- Strict biodiversity monitoring continues, conducted by NAPA and independent experts, assessing species presence and ensuring conservation protocols are upheld.
- Noise and light reduction measures have been successfully implemented to minimize disturbances to migratory birds.
- A dedicated ecological oversight team is actively monitoring compliance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) conditions, ensuring immediate corrective actions if required.

It is important to emphasize that environmental assessments and monitoring protocols are ongoing, allowing authorities to adapt conservation strategies as necessary. The Albanian Government remains open to further collaboration with the Bern Convention and international conservation organizations to ensure that all environmental concerns are addressed effectively.

Furthermore the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has initiated the certification process for VIA Airport, where one of the regulatory requirements to be addressed prior to certification is the submission by the operator of a Wildlife Risk Management Program.

2. The wildlife risk management program may cover an area of approximately 13 km (7 NM) from the aerodrome point of reference and must include, at least, the following elements:

a. staffing:

- i. a person who is responsible for developing and implementing the wildlife risk program
- ii. a person who oversees daily wildlife control activities and analyzes the data collected, and conducts risk assessments to develop and implement the wildlife risk program

- iii. trained and qualified staff to discover and record birds/wildlife
 - b. a process to report, collect and record data on struck and living birds/wildlife;
 - c. a process to analyse data and assess risk to birds/wildlife to develop mitigation measures, proactive and reactive measures. This should include a risk assessment methodology;
 - d. a process to manage the habitat and land both on and around the site, whenever possible, in order to reduce the attractiveness of the area to birds/wildlife;
 - e. a process to remove dangerous birds/wildlife;
 - f. a process for liaison with non-aeroportual agencies and local landowners, etc. to ensure that the airport is aware of developments that may contribute to creating additional risks to birds within the vicinity of the airport infrastructure, vegetation, land use and activities (for example harvesting crops, sowing seeds, ploughing, installation of land or water features, hunting, etc. that may attract birds/wildlife).
3. In support of addressing wildlife management, DCM 784 has been recently approved, dated 18/12/2024 “Decision on determining the rules for the development of airport areas”, in which the Article 10 refers to: “The development of activities or activities that may attract wildlife within protected airport areas are subject of preliminary assessments by the CAA.
4. The CAA has a dedicated function for the environment, where coordination with the airport will play a key role on: establishing an Environmental Management System, which includes the entire set of procedures and policies that the operator should follow for the full implementation of requirements for the protection of the environment, surrounding areas and the management of wildlife risks.
5. CAA has approved by the Executive Director Decision, a guiding document, Wildlife Hazard Management Guidance Material ACAA-DAD-GM7-WHM, dated 15.05.2024, which serves as a good guidance for operators to use regarding the management of wildlife and the protection of areas around the airport.
6. CAA in implementation of Article 9 of Ministerial Order 170/2022 will ensure that consultations are carried out in relation to human activities and land use such as:
- a. any development or change in land use in the aerodrome area
 - b. the creation of areas that may encourage the activity of wild animals that might harm aircraft operations;
7. CAA in implementation of Article 10 of Ministerial Order 170/2022 Wildlife Hazard Management will ensure that this assessment is carried out through:
- a. establishing a national procedure for recording and reporting wildlife strikes on aircraft;
 - b. collecting information from aircraft operators, aerodrome personnel and other sources on the presence of wildlife that poses a potential risk to aircraft operations;

c. an ongoing wildlife risk assessment by competent personnel.

8. As part of fulfilling the obligations in Order of Minister No. 170/2022, AMC1 ADR.OPS.B.020 “Reducing the risk of wildlife strikes”, CAA will coordinate the establishment of a national wildlife strike risk reduction program, in which the aerodrome operator and stakeholders will be part.

9. Part of the CAA's oversight activities at the operator will be to cover the field of wildlife management.

10. Part of the discussions in working groups such as RST will be wildlife management. All airport stakeholders participate in the RST, including environmental experts according to thematic areas.

The Law on Protected Areas, which has now been fully approved and enacted, provides a strengthened legal framework for protected area governance, enforcement, and conservation in Albania. Contrary to concerns raised, the law does not weaken environmental protection; instead, it:

- Strengthens legal enforcement against illegal activities, including poaching and unauthorized construction in protected areas.
- Expands the responsibilities and resources available to NAPA, reinforcing its role in safeguarding Albania's natural heritage.
- Aligns national conservation policies with EU directives, ensuring compliance with Albania's European integration commitments.

Regarding concerns over zonation in protected landscapes, it is important to clarify that while the new law has removed strict zonation for certain protected landscapes, this does not mean a reduction in protection. Instead, the new approach enhances flexibility in management while maintaining strong conservation safeguards. The following principles ensure continued environmental protection:

- A more flexible and adaptive management approach allows local authorities to respond to conservation needs dynamically rather than being bound by rigid zonation rules.
- Management plans will still define specific restrictions and conservation measures tailored to each protected landscape, ensuring that biodiversity conservation remains a top priority.
- The removal of zonation does not equate to reduced protection, as protected landscapes still fall under the highest environmental governance frameworks dictated by the law.

To mitigate risks, the law requires the development of detailed management plans for each protected landscape, specifying:

- Areas where economic activities such as tourism and agriculture are permissible.
- Strict biodiversity monitoring and impact assessment mechanisms.
- Prohibitions on activities that could significantly degrade ecosystems or alter the natural landscape.

While the Bern Convention has expressed concern over the elimination of zonation, it is important to note that many European countries manage protected landscapes using adaptive management principles rather than strict zoning. The new Albanian legal framework aligns with international best practices by:

- Encouraging community-based conservation approaches.
- Ensuring management remains flexible yet science-based.

- Providing legal instruments for intervention if any activities threaten biodiversity.

This approach ensures that protected landscapes remain safeguarded while allowing for sustainable economic activities, balancing conservation needs with local development priorities. The Albanian Government remains committed to international conservation standards and will continue to monitor and refine management strategies based on best practices and scientific input.

Sincerely,