

Interview with Paulo Constantino of proTEJO about his WFMD Event: For a Free Tagus

1) Could you tell us about your event, and what its primary objectives are?

Description of the event

proTEJO will celebrate World Fish Migration Day on October 24th with the canoe descent "8th Vow against indifference" and the Iberian concentration of citizens "For a Free Tagus" in a demonstration against the construction of weirs and dams with the purpose of retaining water for consumption in intensive agriculture and defending a free river with fluvial dynamics to ensure the migratory flows of fish species, the conservation of aquatic ecosystems and habitats and the enjoyment of the river by riverside populations.

The "8th Vow against indifference" starts in the morning in the avieira village of Caneiras with the reading of the "Letter Against Indifference" and continues with a river trip in a canoe that aims to provide an experience of communion with the beauty of the natural heritage of a free Tagus river with river dynamics and associated with traditional fishing in the municipality of Cartaxo and in the municipality of Santarém, in particular, the avieira villages of Palhota and Caneiras.

This natural and cultural heritage of Tagus must be defended by the rejection of the projects for the construction of new weirs and dams - Tagus Project and the Dam Project in Ocreza river - and the requirement for regulation of those that already exist in order to guarantee: a fluvial regime suitable to the practice of nautical activities and the migration and reproduction of fish species; an establishment of true ecological flows; and a river continuity provided by efficient passages for fish and small boats.

Among the citizens there will be a very significant participation of friends from the Tagus of Spain belonging to the Citizenship Network for a New Culture of Water of Tagus and its affluent, many participants are expected, as is the case, proving that the defence of the Iberian rivers goes beyond administrative borders and unites citizens with the same problems, regardless of their nationality.

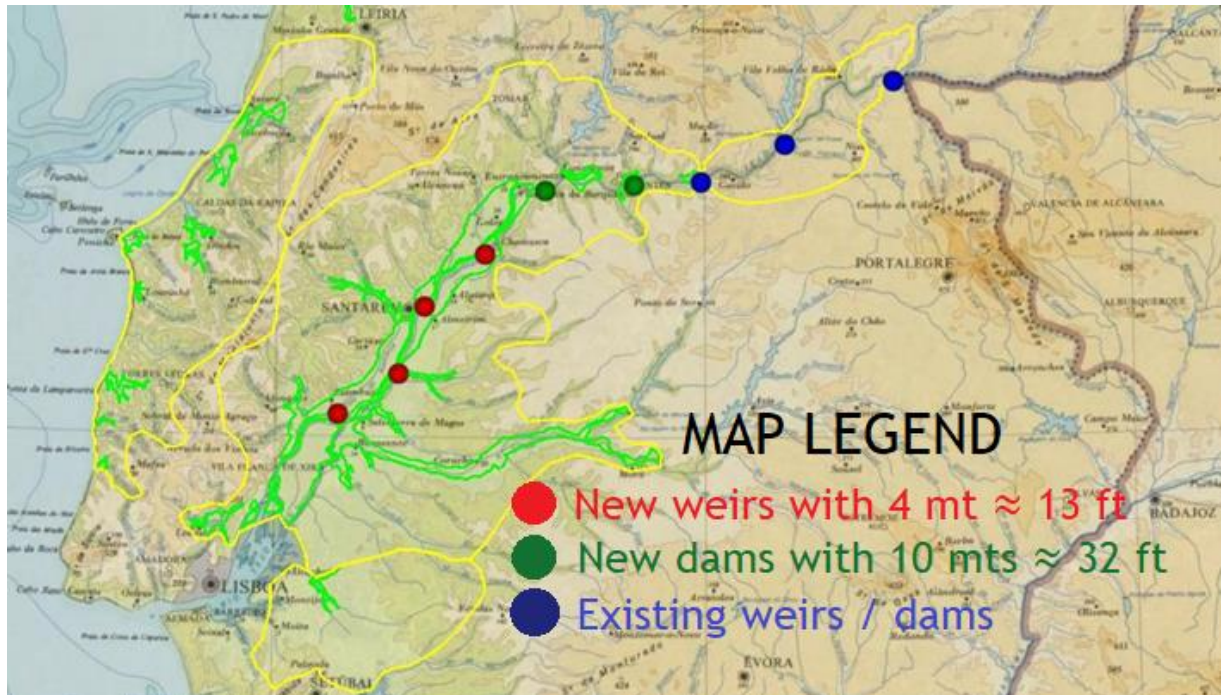
The Iberian Concentration "For a Free Tagus", in celebration of the World Fish Migration Day will take place in the afternoon on the river beach of Valada with the presentation of the memorandum "For a Free Tagus", about importance of preserving a Tagus river free of weirs and dams to ensure the migratory flows of fish species, the conservation of aquatic ecosystems and habitats and the enjoyment of the river by riverside populations, which will be sent to Parliamentary Groups, to the Parliamentary Environment Committee, to the Minister of Environment and Climate Action and to the Minister of Agriculture, and the sharing of testimonies from citizens, associations and communities present.

It is also intended to raise the awareness of riverside populations about the over-exploitation of the Tagus water that is approaching with the construction of new weirs and dams and the ones that already exists in view of the economic management of the hydroelectric dams of the Spanish province of Extremadura, the transfer of water from the Tagus river to intensive agriculture in the south of Spain and the aggression of agricultural, industrial and nuclear pollution, also emphasizing the importance of the return of ways of life linked to water and the river that the activities of education and tourism of nature, cultural and environmental will allow to sustain.

Main objectives

proTEJO wants to draw attention to the importance of rejection and to detain the construction of weirs and dams by a set of projects destined to the Tagus basin and nicknamed "Alqueva of Tagus", which came to be called "Tagus Project - Hydraulic Infrastructure of Multiple Ends of the Tagus and West", in progress since February 2018, and which foresees " (...) an investment of € 4.5 billion for the creation of a 30-year irrigation project that will make the Tagus navigable between Lisbon and Abrantes."

The “Tagus Project” intends to expand intensive irrigation from 100 thousand hectares to 300 thousand hectares, in the Tagus hydrographic region and the western rivers, when in Spain the area of intensive irrigation in the Tagus is 200 thousand hectares, proposing to build 6 new weirs and dams from Vila Franca de Xira to Abrantes, with the main objective of capturing water for intensive irrigation, controlling the advance of the saline wedge near the river mouth and creating a strategic reserve of surface and underground water.



A year later, on April 23, 2019, it was reported, according to statements by the Minister of Agriculture, that the “Tagus Project” will be studied by the Executive to assess its technical and financial viability.

More recently, on May 15, 2020, the Parliamentary Environment Committee of the Assembly of the Republic recommended to the Government the revision of the Albufeira Convention, by the end of the year, paving the way to end an Alive and Free Tagus River and create an ecological imbalance in its estuary by proposing the "removal of the scope of the Albufeira Convention from the minimum flow foreseen for the Muge Bridge section" and the carrying out of a study on the "Tejo Project".

In effect, the removal of the minimum flow of 4,000 hm³ foreseen under the Convention for the Tagus River in the section of the Muge Bridge section, close to the estuary, one of its few norms with an ecological function that aims to ensure that the river flows with sufficient flow up to its estuary and to the sea, together with the construction of the 6 new weirs from Vila Franca de Xira to Abrantes proposed by the “Tagus Project”, whose study is also recommended, could jeopardize the transport of nutrients necessary for the subsistence of estuarine ecosystems and sediments to the estuary and even to the beaches on the coast.

This proposal may cause an irreversible negative environmental impact on the ecological balance of the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve and only arises from the fact that the maintenance of this minimum flow on the Muge Bridge provided for in the Albufeira Convention impede the objective of tripling the water consumption of the Tagus River, for the expansion of intensive irrigation from 100 thousand hectares to 300 thousand hectares, as intended by the “Tagus Project”.

Even so, proTEJO will do everything to avoid the “Tagus Project” due to its negative consequences in environmental terms, namely, the fact that it implies non-compliance with the Water Framework Directive from European Union, and will require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (AAE) that integrates the development of studies of alternative projects, taking into account all the alternatives

that are environmentally, financially and technologically more effective, a cost recovery policy for water services and the appropriate use of public funds considering the opportunity cost of these projects.

2) Why is this topic important in your region?

We consider it extremely important to preserve the last 200 km of a Tagus River that is alive and free to maintain a fluvial dynamic that mitigates the impact of the rise in the average level of sea waters, ensuring the ecological balance of the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve, preserving water ecosystems, habitats and biodiversity, as well as promoting nature and regional tourism based on the natural landscape of the Tagus River and the gastronomy of the river's fish species.

3) Have you participated in WFMD before? If so why did you choose to participate again? And if not why did you choose to participate for the first time?

No. It is the first time that we participated because we were previously unaware of the organization of World Fish Migration Day.

4) Do you have any recommendations or words of encouragement for people considering planning their own WFMD event?

We call on all citizens of the world to come together to defend the quality and quantity of water in their rivers and streams, as well as to remove barriers to river connectivity in order to have healthy rivers and streams that provide the ecological services that Life, Fishes and Society need so much.

And have very precise objectives and a lot of perseverance!!!

Our motto comes from the lyrics of the singer Jorge Palma and the poems of Miguel Torga.

"We will go on" from Jorge Palma, Portuguese singer

"As long as there is a road to walk

We will continue

As long as there is a road to walk

As long as there are winds and sea

We will not stop

As long as there are winds and sea"

And let's say with Miguel Torga, because poets know how to see the future

"Restart

If you can,

Without anguish and without haste.

And the steps you take

On this hard path

From the future

Give them in freedom.

Until you reach

Don't rest."

The Tagus deserves it!

5) Anything else you would like people receiving our newsletter/social media to know?

That is all folks!