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Chile's Biodiversity at a Crossroads: The Challenges and Promise of Law 21.600

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Chile's biodiversity is under severe threat, with nearly 50 percent of its ecosystems endangered and over 80 percent underrepresented in the current conservation framework. A report by Eduardo Katz, from the well-known Chilean thinktank Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP), highlights these critical issues and discusses the potential solutions offered by the recently enacted Law 21.600.^{1,2} This law marks a significant institutional advance in biodiversity conservation, integrating the management of protected areas and biodiversity under the National Service of Biodiversity and Protected Areas (SBAP) in a single and specialized public agency. Until now, the management of protected areas in Chile was divided in five different government agencies and ministries. However, Katz points out that, while the law is a vital step forward, there are several obstacles to successful implementation. Administrative challenges, insufficient incentives, and a lack of strong collaboration between public and private sectors are some of the key hurdles in achieving Chile's conservation goals.

Chile's Ecosystem Crisis

In his report, Katz emphasizes that Chile's ecosystems are facing immense pressure due to factors such as land-use changes, habitat fragmentation, and climate change. The central and southern regions are particularly vulnerable, where agricultural expansion and urban development have led to severe biodiversity loss. A significant portion of Chile's ecosystems remains inadequately protected, with many areas falling short of the necessary conservation measures.

¹ Eduardo Katz, Professor at the University of San Sebastián, Chile, and Researcher at the Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP) from 2022 to 2024.

² Katz, E. (2024). *Implementación de la Ley 21.600 y los desafíos para lograr la protección efectiva del 30% de los ecosistemas*. Centro de Estudios Públicos. https://static.cepchile.cl/uploads/cepchile/2024/07/18-161955_o10z_katz_700.pdf

Chile has committed to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework adopted by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, a new global international agreement which aims to protect 30 percent of Earth's land and oceans by 2030. However, Katz notes that public lands alone, through the National Systems of Protected Areas, although fundamental, will be insufficient for reaching this target. The new law recognizes the importance of private land in conservation efforts, but many challenges remain, particularly for private landowners who may be reluctant to participate.

Law 21.600 (SBAP): A Step Forward with Substantial Challenges

As Katz explains, Law 21.600 seeks to integrate private lands into the national conservation strategy, helping to close gaps in ecosystem protection. It introduces several mechanisms to incentivize private landowners, such as tax exemptions and technical support. Additionally, it offers different categories for Private Protected Areas (PPAs), allowing landowners to choose the level of commitment they wish to make.

However, Katz outlines several challenges. For instance, the administrative processes required to participate in conservation programs are complex and time-consuming, which may deter many landowners. Furthermore, the incentives provided by the law, while useful as a starting point, may not be enough to encourage widespread participation. The law's stringent monitoring mechanisms also create concerns about punitive measures, further reducing its appeal for private stakeholders.

Key Recommendations for Effective Implementation

In his analysis, Katz offers several recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of Law 21.600. These focus on addressing the disincentives faced by private landowners and improving the overall attractiveness of conservation efforts.

1. Simplifying Administrative Processes and Enhancing Incentives

Katz argues that simplifying the administrative requirements, such as the complex application procedures and detailed management plans, will significantly reduce barriers for landowners. Providing more competitive incentives, particularly for properties with high ecological value, is also essential. Increasing funding for the National Biodiversity Fund (FNB) and linking it directly to the expansion and effectiveness of private conservation areas could further encourage participation.

2. Creating Flexible Conservation Commitments

One of the main concerns for private landowners, according to Katz, is the long-term nature of conservation commitments. He suggests introducing shorter-term, progressive agreements that allow landowners to gradually increase their conservation efforts. This approach would reduce uncertainty and allow landowners to gain confidence in managing their lands for conservation over time.

3. Supporting Non-Monetary Incentives and Capacity Building

In addition to financial incentives, Katz stresses the importance of non-monetary rewards such as

skill development, management support, and public recognition. These incentives can be particularly effective in building a community of conservation-minded landowners. Katz also advocates for the creation of conservation networks to share best practices and strengthen local participation.

4. **Strengthening Government and Private Sector Collaboration**

Effective collaboration between the government, private sector, and local communities is critical to the success of Chile's conservation strategies. Katz recommends a decentralized approach, with policies adapted to regional contexts, and highlights the importance of pilot projects that can be scaled up once proven successful. Improving inter-ministerial coordination is also essential to align biodiversity management with other national priorities, such as climate change mitigation and land-use planning.

Conclusion

In his report for the Centro de Estudios Públicos (CEP), Katz provides a detailed roadmap for improving the implementation of Law 21.600. While the law represents a major step forward in addressing Chile's biodiversity crisis, its success depends on addressing the challenges facing private landowners and ensuring effective collaboration across sectors. Katz's recommendations focus on simplifying administrative processes, enhancing incentives, and promoting flexible, progressive conservation commitments. By doing so, Chile can move closer to its goal of protecting 30 percent of its ecosystems by 2030, safeguarding its natural heritage for future generations.

[Read the full report here \(Spanish\).](#)