
Chile: Pulp mill takes death to the sea

Celulosas Arauco and Constitución pulp mill, better known as Celco, located in Valdivia, belong to the Chilean Angelini group. It recently re-launched their operations after having been closed for 64 days following the scandal arising from the mass death of black-necked swans in the Rio Cruces sanctuary where it discharged its effluents.

Days before it reopened, the company had received the backing of President Ricardo Lagos and the local environmental authorities in taking this decision. On announcing its reopening, the company stated that it had “gained experience” and begged the “pardon of the community of Valdivia for the trouble and concern that it had had to face.”

“The plant is in a condition to restart operations, but with its capacity limited to 80% as it must make changes and technological investments to adjust to the new demands established by COREMA [regional environmental authority] X Region and return to its originally authorised production,” stated the company.

Celco also adopted other provisions. To start off with, it decided to implement the project of building a pipeline to the sea, alleging that this solution had been “reiterated by the President of the Republic during his recent visit to Valdivia.” The project also has the approval of the Corema.

The management of Celco recently acknowledged the alternative of transporting and dumping liquid industrial waste in the sea, using pipelines that would flow into a sector between the Queule cove zones or in the vicinity of Puerto Saavedra, in exchange for participating in the construction of a new sea port in the area, benefiting the plantations companies that would be able to take their products out of the zone directly for export.

The project would impact on the Mapuche Lafkenche communities, inhabiting the coast, and extending to the southern zone of the VIII Region, for whom the sea provides for their livelihood. The Mapuche and environmentalist organisations of the IX Region had announced this during a mobilisation under the slogan of “Meeting in diversity for the defence of environmental rights” which took place in Temuco on 9 July.

Furthermore, a demonstration at the port of Valdivia, with the participation of vessels from various coves in the province, the trade unions and fisher-people associations, social organisations and Mapuche-Lafkenche communities in the region expressed their rejection of the pipeline from the factory flowing into the sea.

“The alleged spearhead technology announced by the pulp mill has already left its mark on the Cruces River and now they intend it to reach the sea. I am telling Mr. [President] Ricardo Lagos that this pipeline will not empty into the sea because we will oppose it,” expressed Eliab Viguera, of the Committee for the Defence of the Sea.

A document submitted by the demonstrators states that “The high danger of the pulp mill pipeline

which, even with tertiary treatment caused the death of the wetlands (...) was demonstrated in a study undertaken by the Austral University of Chile, the only serious scientific study of public domain.”

For many companies and governments, this evidence is only a public relations problem. They hire public opinion consultants, scientists and social workers but to study “how to sell the product better,” in this case the investment project, because their decisions are immovable.

Thus the crises are postponed, the companies make money and the affected peoples, to make themselves heard, must take their demonstrations to the extremes of confrontation. When they explode the powers are “surprised” and ask for moderation.

Article based on information from: “Chile, Celulosa Arauco ‘pide disculpas’ y reabre su planta”, Víctor L. Bacchetta, e-mail: vbacchetta@redcalc.org, http://www.rel-uita.org/agricultura/ambiente/celulosa_arauco.htm; “Celulosa Celco ahora va por el litoral Lafkenche”, Alfredo Seguel, Mapuexpress Informativo Mapuche, <http://www.mapuexpress.net>