

09th June, 2015

Subject: Douro Wine Producers concerns about the construction of the Foz Tua dam and high voltage power line on the Alto Douro Wine Region (ADWR).

To UNESCO

The World Heritage Committee and the World Heritage Centre

Dear Sirs/Madams,

The Wine Producers subscribing this letter would like to express once again their profound concerns with the construction of the Foz Tua dam and its high voltage power line on the Alto Douro Wine Region (ADWR), following similar warnings by Platform Save the Tua (PST). PST is a coalition of wine producers, tourism business, local and environmental NGO who aim to protect the Tua Valley and its centennial railway and enhance the Alto Douro heritage; this is incompatible with the construction of the Foz Tua dam and power line. The Tua Valley is part of the Alto Douro Wine Region (ADWR), classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2001.

Reports by ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre (WHC) in 2011 and 2012 identified a conflict between the dam and the ADWR property integrity. However, in 2012 the World Heritage Committee was misled into admitting compatibility between the dam and the ADWR. PST and other wine producers have repeatedly presented evidence that key demands by UNESCO on impact mitigation have not been and are not going to be met. The implications of the Tua Dam construction and the incompatibility with UNESCO specific criteria for World Heritage classification have been demonstrated in the PST reports to UNESCO, including the "Report on non-compliance of commitments by EDP and the Portuguese State on the Alto Douro Wine Region and Foz Tua dam" (May 2014) Such reports referred the UNESCO guidelines not being met by EDP or the Portuguese State. All the documents are once again attached.

This process has been the subject of unprecedented national dispute in the last years in Portugal. Few other causes have gathered as many stakeholders in one platform or acted as firmly on a legal basis as Platform Save the Tua has done so far. One of the many causes is the Tua railway deactivation and destruction, given its value both as a unique cultural landmark, and its practical use as local transportation, regional link and extraordinary touristic asset. Since the beginning of the dam project, local and national protest movements have launched petitions to the National Parliament in the hope of restoring the railway (which implies stopping the dam). So far three petitions were taken to Parliament, with over 17 000 signatures. This is highly significant, especially considering the Tua valley in 2013 had only 53 000 inhabitants. Although different stakeholder's members of PST have different priorities, they share the will to preserve the Tua railway, recognizing it as one of the most important assets of the region.

In June 2014, a group of fifteen Douro Wine Producers sent a letter to UNESCO highlighting concerns over the construction of the Foz Tua dam: habitat and water quality degradation and microclimate alterations, which will at the least increase production costs due to higher humidity levels. Together with the railway deactivation, the impacts of the dam on the landscape will inevitably decrease the high quality and potential of related activities in this part of the ADWR, such as Wine Tourism. The answer received from UNESCO in July did not refute any of our specific allegations and did not address any of the substantive issues.

In October 2014, the Portuguese Government approved the aerial high voltage power line connecting the hydropower plant to the national electrical grid. The 40 km power line will have profound impacts on the classified landscape: it crosses the heart of the ADWR with a series of highly visible towers, 68 m high; the option of a subterranean power line was not considered. These concerns have been presented to UNESCO on a PST letter sent on the 26th November 2014; no answer was received.

The signatories are deeply surprised and worried by the lack of any meaningful response from UNESCO in this situation. We recall the specific threats to the ADWR (profound degradation of the Douro landscape, danger to the microclimate essential for wine production, destruction of the Tua valley), and also the contempt shown by EDP and by the Portuguese State regarding specific commitments before UNESCO: that the new power line would not affect the ADWR, that a mobility scheme equivalent to the railway (which will be destroyed) would be put in place.

Both the Tua dam and power line will affect the integrity and authenticity of the natural and cultural assets of the ADWR: it will likely affect negatively wine production to an unknown extent, inevitably scar part of the landscape and certainly destroy cultural heritage that is a key part of the ADWR history. However, UNESCO seems blithely unaware of the reason it created a buffer zone in the first place. Without railways



such as the Tua, and rivers such as Tua and Sabor, the ADWR will soon be reduced to a few terraced vineyards amputated from the surrounding landscape.

There is a reason why sites such as the ADWR are classified World Heritage: to safeguard them from destruction and to ensure future generations might benefit from it. UNESCO must take action now against the proposed power line and dam, before irreversible damage makes it too late.

We therefore request UNESCO to inform the Portuguese State that the Foz Tua dam and power line has been shown incompatible with the ADWR. We further request UNESCO to table this issue to the next World Heritage Committee Meeting.