

REQUEST AR-MICI002-2011, November 03, 2010

PROJECT: PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURAL SERVICES PROGRAM II (PROSAP II)

My name is Gustavo Neme, Archeologist and Ph.D in Natural Sciences, working for the CONICET in the Anthropology Department of the Natural History Museum of San Rafael, Mendoza.

I am writing in reference to this project: PROVINCIAL AGRICULTURAL SERVICES PROGRAM (PROSAP) IADB LOAN 1956/OC-AR. PROVINCE OF MENDOZA (GENERAL IRRIGATION DEPARTMENT) MENDOZA IRRIGATION PROGRAM

BID No. 1: SOCAVON CHANNEL UPGRADE AND UNIFICATION PROJECT - FRUGONI MARCO (DIAMANTE RIVER) BID No. 2: IRRIGATION SYSTEM UPGRADE PROJECT FOR THE CANAL MATRIZ NUEVO ALVEAR (ATUEL RIVER)

Almost a year ago we learned about this project funded by the IDB, and we contacted the parties responsible for its implementation in the Departments of San Rafael and General Alvear. At the time we submitted our concerns in the sense that such a development, though having undeniable significance for the southern region of Mendoza, posed serious risks to the area archeological wealth. The San Rafael and General Alvear oases are located in the middle of semi-arid areas, therefore the Atuel and Diamante rivers became areas of concentration for native people before the arrival of the European settlers.

Thus, it is paramount to be extremely careful when starting activities that involve land movement. There is a great deal of background showing that many native people lived around the Atuel and Diamante rivers; therefore, this area is highly sensitive from the archeological standpoint (Lagiglia 1968; Semper and Lagiglia 1968; Lagiglia 1999; Gil et al 2005; Gil et al 2009; Neme and Gil 2008 among others).

When we submitted our concerns to the attention of the Provincial Irrigation Agency (located in San Rafael) we were told that the IDB considered the need of conducting an archeological impact study as an inescapable requirement for the implementation of the construction project, and that said organization was going to provide the funding for such project. At the time, we also provided a roster of the archeologists residing within the Province who could carry out the project, so as to let them freely choose a professional that they may deem qualified.

Since the project work had already started, we went back in various occasions, and the only answer we got to our inquiries was that we should wait until such a decision was made in Mendoza. Specifically, a year after the beginning of the project activities (this should have been carried out several months ago), there have been no impact assessments; when we last checked with them, we were told that no other interests (whether regarding any property, environment, etc.) should be given any priority over the common or public good.

Recently, upon starting the work on the Nuevo Alvear main channel (second phase of the project), there have been land excavations in an archeological site (La Olla) that has already been valued and protected as a result of an archeological impact assessment carried out for the construction of a subsidiary channel of the Atuel River two years ago. We also tried to stop such activities, but our requests were ignored since around 80% of the archeological site, which has been determined through carbon dating to be 1200 years old, has been excavated using bulldozers. It should be noted that the Real del Padre

community had plans to turn this archeological site into a museum; thus, the local people continue making any efforts to stop the trucks and bulldozers from further destroying the site.

We are aware of the significance of this project for the local communities of the southern region of Mendoza, but we also know that caring for our archeological wealth (protected by Law No. 6034, Decree 1882 in our province) does not necessarily mean standing against development of a province. We only need to do the right thing, recognizing the IDB plans to be well-intended ones, as shown by the actions of the ICIM.

Though the Province Cultural Heritage Agency offered to issue an order to stop any such activities, we chose to directly contact the financial institution, since we are aware of previous instances where the IDB has found a solution for this kind of issues without having another national or judicial agency interfering thereon.

I thank you in advance for any consideration to this matter, and hope that this concern will be reviewed. Since this is our first contact, I chose not to include any names nor dates, which will be provided upon request in order to give more background information on the issue.

Sincerely,

Gustavo Neme

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]