
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Monique Limón, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SR 51 **Hearing Date:** July 8, 2025
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Urgency: **Fiscal:**
Consultant: Katharine Moore

Subject: Protecting The Amazon Rainforest In Ecuador

SUMMARY

This measure would commend the advocacy of the Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, the Nacionalidad Kichwa de Pastaza, and their communities for their steadfast work in protecting the Amazon biome and safeguarding the future for their children and our entire planet, and commit the Senate to investigating the impact of California's role in the consumption of crude sourced from the Amazon region and exploring ways that changes to state policies and practices can assist with efforts to preserve and protect the Amazon rainforest.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

The Amazon rainforest

The Amazon, covering a broad swath of South America and multiple countries, is home to over 10% of the planet's known species, numerous indigenous peoples, and is an important component of the Earth's hydrological and carbon cycles. In the last several decades, increasing deforestation – now estimated to be on the order of 20% with another 6% degraded – for settlement, illegal logging, agricultural, and industrial purposes has adversely impacted the Amazon, its biodiversity, and its ecological and climate resiliency. Recent scientific research suggests that the Amazon will reach an ecological “tipping point” at 25% deforestation and convert to savannah conditions with disruptive impact to biodiversity, the peoples who live there, and the Earth's climate. Massive wildfires in recent years have had both immediate local and worldwide impacts.

Ecuador

Ecuador, located in northwestern South America, includes on the order of 52,400 square miles of the Amazon. Ecuador was in recession in 2024 with an economic contraction of about 2.5% due in part to high rates of violence, political uncertainty, and energy shortages, according to the World Bank. The energy shortages were due to the worst drought in 60 years impacting hydroelectric generation. In 2023, Ecuador's primary commodity exports were crude petroleum, shellfish and fish, bananas, and gold.

According to the US Energy Information Administration (USEIA), Ecuador has 0.5% of the world's oil reserves (at about 8.3 billion barrels) and produced approximately 482,000 barrels per day of petroleum and other liquids, primarily from its Amazon region in 2022. State-owned Petroecuador produced about 80% of the country's oil production and also controls refining. Mineral rights are owned by the federal government in Ecuador, although several indigenous peoples – the Sápara, Shiawiar, Kichwa, Waorani, Achuar, and Shuar – collectively hold title to millions of hectares of land in and around the Ecuadorean Amazon where the oil reserves are located. There is

indigenous resistance to continued oil development, and the legal framework to obtain consent from indigenous peoples for oil development is considered ineffective by many. Recent reviews and surveys show an association between health problems – such as cancer – and oil development in Ecuador, particularly in indigenous populations, likely stemming from contamination by hazardous compounds. According to the sponsor, indigenous resistance has resulted in oil majors leaving Ecuador.

Ecuador's oil industry has struggled to maintain production because of aging fields, pipeline disruptions, and environmental concerns. Pipeline disruptions have increased in recent years. Landslides ruptured both the Sistema de Oleoducto Transecuatoriano (SOTE) and Oleoducto de Crudos Pesados (OCP) pipelines in April 2020, resulting in one of Ecuador's worst oil spills. In January 2022, the OCP pipeline was ruptured by falling rocks, resulting in another spill. The spill contaminated over five acres of the Cayambe-Coca National Park. Both pipelines have also been affected by natural disasters and protests. Production fell by almost 18% from January to February 2023 due to pipeline restrictions.

In August 2023, the citizens of Ecuador voted by nearly a 20% margin to reject oil development in Yasuní National Park in its Amazon region. Estimates vary, but reserves on the order of over 700 million barrels are located there. The initiative required that there was one year for 247 wells to be plugged-and-abandoned. After one year, one well was plugged-and-abandoned. Court orders were ignored by the operator.

The federal government of Ecuador continues to plan to hold auctions of additional oil blocks totaling about 2.3 million hectares of intact Amazon rainforest starting in the 1st quarter of 2026 with the goal of increasing production by 600,000 barrels per day by the early 2030s. These oil blocks have no existing oil infrastructure or production. This rainforest is home to the Sapara, Shiwiar, Kichwa, Waorani, Andoa, Shuar, and Achuar peoples who oppose the drilling. The federal government of Ecuador's oil development plans include additional pipelines and a new coastal refinery.

California and oil from Ecuador

In 2024, Ecuador was the #4 source of imported oil to the state's refineries at 43.8 million barrels. This was about 14% of the oil imported that year. In-state production produced 23.3% of the oil refined in the state that year (510.7 million barrels). In previous years, larger amounts and higher percentages of the state's imported oil were sourced from Ecuador.

According to materials provided by Amazon Watch, California is the top consumer of crude oil from the Amazon rainforest. Approximately 50% of all oil exported from the Amazon goes to California refineries. California has been a global leader in addressing climate change and has made important commitments and ambitious goals to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. Recently, leaders from the Ecuadorian Amazon have come to Sacramento to educate California's decisionmakers on the status of deforestation in the Amazon; to explore opportunities to work together on solutions; and highlight that California's fate is interconnected to the health and preservation of the Amazon basin.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

This measure would:

- 1) Commend the advocacy of the Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, the Nacionalidad Kichwa de Pastaza, and their communities for their steadfast work in protecting the Amazon biome and safeguarding the future for their children and our entire planet.
- 2) Commit the Senate to investigating the impact of California's role in the consumption of crude sourced from the Amazon region and exploring ways that changes to state policies and practices can assist with efforts to preserve and protect the Amazon rainforest.
- 3) Make numerous findings in support including that the Amazon is threatened by destruction and degradation due to various activities, including the extractive industry, large scale agribusiness, and illegal logging, that have caused the Amazon to reach a dangerous ecological tipping point, among others.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, "SR 51 is a resolution that connects the California Senate to a matter of global urgency: protecting the Amazon rainforest, defending Indigenous rights, and confronting our shared climate crisis. Ecuador's Yasuní National Park in the Amazon rainforest – one of the most biodiverse places on Earth – over 5 million people recently voted in a national referendum to keep nearly 850 million barrels of oil in the ground—a powerful act of climate leadership. But instead of honoring that vote, Ecuador's government continues to drill – and is opening up more rainforest to oil extraction. Why does this matter to California? Because California is one of the top importers of crude oil from the Amazon. That oil is refined in places like Richmond and Wilmington – communities already burdened by pollution. And when we burn it, we send greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, accelerating the climate crisis that's drying the Amazon and worsening wildfires here at home. This resolution calls on us to investigate our role in Amazon oil consumption and explore how California policy can help protect this critical biome. It's a call for solidarity – with Indigenous defenders, with the planet, and with future generations."

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

None received

COMMENTS

Crude oil is a global commodity. Crude oil is a global commodity that trades in markets around the world and whose price varies in response to changes in supply and demand due to geopolitical events and natural disasters, among other events. The quality of the crude also influences the price, as well as the length of the contract. The United States was a net petroleum exporter of 1.64 million barrels per day in 2023, according to the USEIA.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: none

SUPPORT

Amazon Watch (sponsor)
350 Bay Area Action
California Environmental Voters
Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment
Climate Hawks Vote
Friends Committee on Legislation of California
Friends of the Earth - US
Natural Resources Team, Climate Action California
Oil and Gas Action Network
Pesticide Action and Agroecology Network (PAN)
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
SanDiego350
Stand.earth
Sunflower Alliance
The Climate Center

OPPOSITION

None received

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