

MINUTES OF THE EIGHTH MEETING OF REGIONAL EMPOWERED COMMITTEE OF REGIONAL OFFICE (SZ), BANGALORE HELD ON 28/12/2015 IN THE OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS, HASSAN.

The **Eighth** meeting of the Regional Empowered Committee of RO, SZ, Bangalore was held on **28/12/2015** in the office of the Chief Conservator of Forests, Hassan and the following members attended the meeting:-

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| (1) | Shri Amarnatha Shetty, I.F.S.,<br>Addl. P.C.C.F. (Central)<br>Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change,<br>Regional Office (Southern Zone), Bangalore  | ... | Chairman         |
| (2) | Shri S.M. Somashekar, I.F.S<br>Chief Conservator of Forests (Central)<br>Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change,<br>Regional Office (Southern Zone), Bangalore   | ... | Member           |
| (3) | Shri Suhas Jagannath Godse,<br>House No.525 A, Vodlem Bhat,<br>Near Pandurang Temple, Vodle Bhat,<br>Taleigao, P.O. Caranzalem,<br>Tiswadi, Goa.  | ... | Member           |
| (4) | Dr. B. Shivaraju,<br>No.4, 5 <sup>th</sup> Main, 9 <sup>th</sup> Cross,<br>Radhakrishna Layout, Padmanabhanagar,<br>Bangalore- 560 070, Karnataka.  | ... | Member           |
| (5) | Shri Anur Reddy, I.F.S<br>Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests<br>/Nodal Officer (FCA),<br>Office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests,<br>Forests Department, Govt. of Karnataka,<br>Aranya Bhavan, 18 <sup>th</sup> Cross, Malleswaram,<br>Bangalore – 560 003. | ... | Special Invitee  |
| (6) | Smt. R. Padmawathe, I.F.S<br>Deputy Conservator of Forests (Central)<br>Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change,<br>Regional Office (Southern Zone), Bangalore  | ... | Member Secretary |

Initiating the discussion, the Chairperson extended warm welcome to the Members of the Regional Empowered Committee (REC). The REC examined the following proposal and the recommendations of REC are recorded as under:-



Diversion of 13.93 ha. of forest land in various forest areas of Sakelespura taluk in Hassan District for implementation of Yettinahole project in favour of Executive Engineer, Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Limited (KNNL).

The Regional Empowered Committee in its meeting held on 18/12/2015 discussed this proposal and decided to visit the project site and hold a meeting of the REC in the Office of the CCF, Hassan. The facts and other details of the proposals are recorded in the Minutes of the meeting held on 18/12/2015. Accordingly, the site visit has been undertaken today at 8.00 A.M. independently and impartially to examine the proposal in the light of all these circumstances.

2. While conducting the site visit, some of the activists who are opposed to the project met the Committee and were heard by the Committee in the office of the C.C.F, Hassan after completion of the site inspection between 4 PM to 6 PM. This included the following:-

1. Shri K.N. Soma Shekar,  
Paschima Ghatta Samrakshana Horata Vedike,  
Bengaluru – 4.
2. Shri R.P. Venkatesh Murthy,  
Farmer, Rampura Village,  
Yeslur Hobli,  
Sakaleshpura Taluk,  
Hassan District.
3. Shri H. Sundar Rao.
4. Shri Shashiraj Shetty,  
Kelanda,  
Nethravathi River Thiruvu Horata,  
Dakshina Kannada.
5. Shri V.V. Bhat,  
President- "Janahita"  
Alike, Dakshina Kannada.
6. Shri H.A. Kishor Kumar,  
Advocate & President,  
Malenadu Janapara Horata Samiti,  
Hassan.
7. Shri Purushottam Chitrapur,  
Nethravathi Jeevanadi  
Nethravathi Rakshana Samithi,  
Mangaluru.
8. Shri Dinesh Holla,  
Sahyadri Sanchaya,  
Mangalore.



9. Shri Giridhar Kamath,  
Pandeshwar,  
Mangaluru – 575 001.

3. The highlight of the objections raised against this project are mainly those listed in Para-8 of the Minutes of the 7<sup>th</sup> REC meeting held on 18/12/2015. Additional points raised during the hearing of the above-mentioned persons/organisations are listed below:-

- (i) Actual requirement of forest land is much more than what is not projected by KNNL and the submergible area will also be higher than what is shown in the proposal, as the quantity of water proposed to be lifted cannot be done through the small reservoirs.
- (ii) KNNL is a defaulter and has not complied with the condition of earlier projects.
- (iii) No new projects can be taken up in this area as per the Karnataka High Court order.
- (iv) The project site as a whole falls in the Eco-sensitive zone as per Dr. Kasturi Rangan Report.
- (v) The CA land identified in Chellakere in Chitradurga District is no match to the loss of bio-diversity in this area.
- (vi) Laying of pipeline will cause more damage to the eco-system.
- (vii) Provision of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 not fulfilled and the proposal is against the National Forest Policy, 1988 as it will cause damage to the catchment area of the river.
- (viii) The proposal involves spending of Rs.13,000 crores, but no activity benefiting the downstream population is provided.
- (ix) June to November is not the peak monsoon season and hence the project proposal itself is misleading.
- (x) Fishermen in Coastal Karnataka will be affected, as this diversion is likely to affect the breeding of fishes, as it may alter the salinity of water.
- (xi) Impact of the project on downstream eco-system not assessed.

4. The overall tone is that Western Ghat Eco-system is to be preserved and the Forest Clearance sought is not to be granted. The Group representing Karavali Jeevanadi wanted vented dams to be constructed downstream at 5 M gradient to enhance ground water recharge in these areas.

5. No specific mitigative measures were forthcoming from the discussion the Committee had with the above-mentioned Group as majority of them did not want the project to be taken up.



6. It is also necessary to record the fact that just before 7<sup>th</sup> REC meeting, Chairman and one of the members had received copy of unsigned letter addressed to the Prime Minister, Minister for Environment and Forests, Director General of Forests, Director, CBI, etc. and copied to all media houses through courier from United Lawyer's Forum, Mangalore Bar Association opposing the project and making criminal allegations of showing favouritism and demanding CBI enquiry against these officials, for processing and placing the proposal before the REC with an intention to pressurise the REC from taking independent decision. Existence of such a Forum in the Bar Association of Mangalore is not confirmed. Even while the cases are pending before the Hon'ble NGT and the REC is yet to take a decision, Shri K.N. Somashekar along with some more persons have met the Hon'ble Union Minister and the Director General of Forests urging for interference in the functioning of REC, which is a statutory body constituted under FC Act. All these actions are to be treated as pressure tactics employed by the lobby opposing the project on the independence of the REC.

7. The Committee examined the proposal including the objections raised against the project as well as the site inspection report of CCF (Central). The REC noted that this project is aimed at providing safe drinking water to the drought prone areas of Kolar, Chikkaballapur, Bangalore Rural, Ramanagar, part of Tumkur, Hassan and Chikkamagalur districts. Total population to be benefitted from this scheme for the year 2023-24 is 75.59 lakhs. The Committee has been informed that the Gundia project may have to be dropped consequent to implementation of this drinking water project. Also, there is no proposal on Gundia project before MoEF&CC for diversion of forest land, as such the Committee cannot take into account any of the objections on account of this. The forest land involved is located mostly in the fringe of the reserve forest and Section-4 notified areas and the deemed forest land is the revenue land. The State Government have already gone into the technical feasibility and the availability of water in the catchment area of different weirs through recognised and reputed experts. This Committee is not competent to comment on the technical aspects of the project. Total notified forest area involved in this project is only 8.1 ha. Balance 5.83 ha. of area involved in this clearance is deemed forest under the ownership of the Revenue Department. This is as against the total land requirement of 276.08 ha. for this project and the forest land required is the barest minimum. On the issue of composition of vegetation, in the proposed area, it is noted that only forest near weir No.6 and weir No.3 are having natural vegetation rich in bio-diversity. Rest of the forest area is degraded but artificially regenerated with the species including exotic like *Acacia auriculiformis*. The catchment area of the project is mostly covered by plantations of coffee and tea. Diversion of water without impounding the same in large reservoirs is not expected to have any material impact on the ecology of the catchment area. However, care should be taken to minimise the impact on the down stream region of the project as it flows through natural forests. Hence the imposition of certain conditions as suggested in the site inspection report and the report of the Chief Wildlife Warden is necessary.

8. During the site inspection, the Committee has requested the User Agency to examine the technical feasibility of diverting water from weir No.2 to weir No.8, through a tunnel instead of pumping the same. This will result in lesser requirement of land as well as it will save the



