

**Ministry of Environment and Forests
Wildlife Division**

**Minutes of the 24th Meeting of the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife
held on 13th December 2011 in Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road,
New Delhi.**

The 24th Meeting of the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) was held on 13th December 2011 in Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi under the Chairpersonship of Shrimati Jayanthi Natarajan, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment and Forests. The list of participants who attended the meeting is given at **Annexure-1**. Leave of absence was granted to Dr Asad Rahmani, member of the Standing Committee as he could not attend the meeting due to unavoidable circumstances.

At the outset, the Additional Director General of Forests (WL) and Member-Secretary, Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife welcomed the Hon'ble Chairperson, the members, chief wildlife wardens of the States, and all other delegates and officials who were present in the meeting. In his welcome remarks, the Member-Secretary felicitated the Hon'ble Chairperson for her bold stand at the UNFCCC COP in Durban.

Thereafter, Dr. M.K. Ranjitsinh thanked the Hon'ble Chairperson for having convened the special meeting and also complimented her for her grand performance in Durban COP.

The Hon'ble Chairperson addressed the participants. In her address, Hon'ble Chairperson welcomed all the members and other officials to the meeting of the Standing Committee of NBWL. She mentioned that this meeting was specifically called for discussing the issues raised by the non-official members from time to time. Apart from the agenda by the non-official members, some other important items like the Demwe Hydro Electric Project, Railways project and one case referred by the Hon'ble Supreme Court were on the agenda of the meeting. She thanked the house for lauding her performance at Durban COP, and said that the performance was the result of impeccable team work, for which the entire Indian delegation deserved praise.

Hon'ble Chairperson then requested the Member Secretary to take up the agenda items for discussion.

Agenda item No.1: Confirmation of minutes of 23rd Meeting of the Standing Committee of NBWL held on 14th October 2011.

The Member-Secretary informed that after the minutes of the 23rd Meeting of the Standing Committee (SC) of NBWL were circulated, comments were received from Ms. Prerna Bindra, Shri Kishor Rithe and Dr Divyabhanusinh Chavda. He suggested that the

comments could either be appended at the end of the minutes as an 'Annexure' or the comments could be placed below the recorded minutes of each of the concerned agenda items in a separate paragraph.

Dr Divyabhanusinh Chavda said that presently, the minutes were being uploaded on the Ministry's website after the approval of the Chairperson of the Committee. However, he insisted that serious omissions were there in the recording of the minutes. According to him, the right procedure would be to circulate the minutes amongst the members of the SC in the next meeting after these had been finalized in the Ministry. He opined that only after the comments received from the members in the next meeting, had appropriately been incorporated in the minutes, the same should be uploaded on the website of the Ministry. He suggested that there should not be any objection to recording of the minutes of the non-official members ad-verbatim. He also stated that the comments of the non-official members were unbiased in contrast to those of the Government officials who were bound by the stand of their respective State Governments.

The Member Secretary pointed out that waiting for the comments before uploading the minutes on the website till next meeting of the SC would delay the communication to the State Governments of the recommendations of the SC, and the decision of the MoEF on the same, and, therefore, was not a workable proposition.

Ms. Perna Bindra pointed out that the recorded minutes did not always reflect what had actually been stated by the members, and the comments and statements made by the members were often omitted or diluted or misinterpreted. She added that once, the minutes were put up on the website, the same were quoted in the press, although not necessarily being the true reflection of what the member had said in the meeting, hence it is important that the members see the minutes before they are put on the website. She agreed that the comments and corrections proposed by the non-official members in respect of minutes of an agenda item should be included at the end of presently recorded minutes in a separate paragraph under the agenda item.

The Member-Secretary requested the Committee to accept the suggestion of adding the comments and suggestions of the members in a separate paragraph at the end of the recorded minutes of the agenda item. He further suggested that in future, after the minutes of the meetings were approved by the Chairperson, these would be circulated among all the members for making comments and suggestions, and a period of two weeks would be set aside for the purpose. The minutes would be finalized after appropriately incorporating the comments and suggestions of the members received within the period of two weeks, and thereafter the final minutes would be uploaded on the website.

The suggestions made by the Member Secretary in the above paragraph were unanimously agreed to by the Committee.

Agenda item no.2: Agenda by non official members

Agenda Item No.2.1: Proposed by Dr M. K. Ranjitsinh

1. and 2. Framing of Rules for the functioning of the Standing Committee of NBWL and Mechanism to ensure implementation of conditions stipulated by the Standing Committee while approving proposals

Dr M.K. Ranjitsinh mentioned that the Standing Committee of the NBWL was the executive arm of the main NBWL. However, at present, he said, there were no specific guidelines laid down for the functioning of the Standing Committee, although it was essential to have such guidelines. He also suggested that there should be specific time limits for forwarding of the agenda items with notes and other relevant documents to the members so that the members could come well prepared for the meeting. Moreover, the meetings should not be one-sided, and the views of the non-official members should also be taken into account. Therefore, there was a need to evolve rules, procedures and guidelines for the functioning of the Standing Committee of NBWL. He also said that according to procedure, no proposal falling within a National Park or Sanctuary could come for consideration of the Standing Committee without the approval of the State Board for Wildlife. However, there was no such requirement for the cases that fell within 10 Km from the boundaries of the National Parks and Sanctuaries. In order to bring uniformity in the system, all such proposals falling within 10 Km from the boundaries of National Parks and Sanctuaries should also have the approval of the State Board for Wildlife before being placed for consideration of the Standing Committee of NBWL. According to him, another serious concern was that no detailed procedures had been laid down for the items coming up in the Standing Committee, and many a time, the same proposals would be placed in the meeting even after these had been rejected in earlier meeting(s).

He also mentioned that there was no mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the conditions stipulated by the Standing Committee of NBWL. Once, the permissions were granted, everything was forgotten. He suggested that the Regional Offices (ROs) of the Ministry should be adequately strengthened, and dedicated officials specifically for monitoring the compliance of stipulations related to diversion of wildlife areas, should be posted in the ROs.

Further, he also mentioned that a few members of Standing Committee could inspect such sites with a view to assessing compliance of conditions on field, and report back to the Standing Committee of NBWL.

Dr Ranjitsinh suggested that for looking into the entire gamut of these issues, a Sub-Committee could be constituted by the Standing Committee which would prepare draft rules, procedures and guidelines for functioning of the SC, including conduct of its meetings, and thereafter, the draft could be considered by the Standing Committee for its adoption.

The Member-Secretary mentioned that the Ministry follows existing guidelines as laid down in the Ministry's Notification on the subject, but there was a need to have more specific guidelines for the functioning of the Standing Committee. He also mentioned that there was a plan for strengthening of the Regional Offices, and the need for having dedicated staff for monitoring compliance of stipulations relating to diversion of wildlife areas and other issues related to wildlife conservation would need to be factored into the plan of strengthening of the Regional Offices. For this, a communication would be sent to the DGF&SS for further appropriate action.

The Member Secretary agreed with the suggestion of forming of a sub-committee to propose draft rules, procedures and guidelines for functioning of the SC.

Chairperson stated that the views expressed by Dr Ranjitsinh were extremely valuable and if all the members agreed, a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Dr M.K. Ranjitsinh could be constituted with the IGF (WL) as the Member Convener. She said that other members of the sub-committee would be nominated by the Ministry.

The Committee agreed to the suggestion of the Chairperson. It was also agreed that the Terms of Reference of the sub-committee would be suggested separately, and the sub-committee would submit its report in the next meeting of the Standing Committee of NBWL.

Endorsing the proposal, Dr Shankar Raman suggested that all other similar agenda items suggested by the members should also be linked to the sub-committee's mandate, and requested that the sub-committee specifically consider the suggestions made in earlier letters to the Chairperson and Member Secretary for improvement of the functioning of the Standing Committee. Shri Kishor Rithe suggested to keep in view the legal aspects of the administrative functioning of the Standing Committee. Other members of the Standing Committee, viz, Ms. Perna Bindra and Dr Shankar Raman had also listed their agenda items on the same issue, and they agreed to club their suggestions with the mandate of the sub-committee. Ms. Perna Bindra further requested that the matters she had raised regarding the functioning of the Standing Committee, put forward in her earlier letter to the former Chairperson and in her agenda be considered by the sub-committee.

3. Central funding to be restricted to Protected Areas directly under the Wildlife Wing and managed by trained officers

Dr Ranjitsinh pointed out that there was a serious dearth of trained and specialized officers in the wildlife wing/department of the States. He mentioned that the then Prime Minister, late Smt. Indira Gandhi, had suggested and reiterated the need for trained wildlife personnel for managing wildlife areas, and that he had copy of the letter with him, wherein she had strongly recommended the need for trained and specialized officers specifically trained in wildlife techniques and issues. He also pointed out that the WII was set up as a special institute for imparting wildlife training to the officers from States and others. However, the institute was not having adequate funds for the purpose.

He informed about the nine-month training course for 20 trainees in WII and that the training imparted to the officials was free of cost. However, the State Governments were usually sending only 2 officials in contrast with **18** officials being deputed by the SAARC countries in this programme. This showed the apathy of the State Governments towards this important issue. He also suggested that Central funding should not be extended to the States who were not serious about the training of their officials in wildlife science. He suggested that it should be communicated to the States that if 50 percent of their wildlife Protected Areas (PAs) did not come to be manned by trained personnel within next 3 years, no funding support would be given to them after three years.

In response to this, the Member Secretary informed that the restrictions suggested by Dr Ranjitsinh could lead to surrender of funds by the MoEF as the States were not expected to improve their performance drastically with respect to positioning of wildlife trained staff in the PAs. He stated that the suggestion would prove to be counterproductive if it was implemented. He added that it was true that wildlife wings and protected areas were run by officials with non-wildlife background also, but if we stop funding because personnel with wildlife specialization were not posted, we may not be able to spend the amount sanctioned to the MoEF (Wildlife Division) by the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission may then downsize the funds allocated to the wildlife sector from the present Rs.70 crores to say Rs. 40 crores, which would create more problems, and ultimately grossly underfunded Sanctuaries would suffer further.

Some members pointed out that already there was a proposal by the Planning Commission to merge the three centrally funded schemes, viz, Project Tiger, Project Elephant and Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats, and that any withholding of funds at this stage, would not be advisable.

Speaking in this context, Ms. Prerna Bindra informed that members of the NBWL had, sent a letter opposing such a move since it would be a very retrograde step and would adversely impact efforts to conserve wildlife and nature, and the national animal in particular. Secretary (E&F) informed that the proposal had since been shelved.

The Chief Wildlife Warden of Maharashtra, said that sanctuaries which were the last priority of the State would suffer, if the already meager funding available to them from MoEF was further reduced.

Shri Kishor Rithe suggested that MoEF should prescribe a timeframe for the States to train the requisite staff in wildlife management, failing which the funding support from the Ministry for wildlife management should be discontinued.

Dr Ranjitsinh further suggested that we may strongly communicate to every State that at least 50% of their wildlife staff should be trained or have specialization in the wildlife background within the next 3 years.

Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh mentioned that the funding to the WII had gone down drastically, and there was a need to enhance the funding to WII to cater to the need for training of officials on wildlife issues.

Shri Biswajit Mohanty suggested for amending the CSS itself by making training of wildlife staff as one of the conditions for the States being eligible to seek central funds for wildlife management from MoEF.

The DGF&SS mentioned that gross generalizations should be avoided since there were several States that make serious efforts to train their wildlife staff but many times the problem actually was shortage of money. He also opined that we should look at the performance, inclination and interest of individuals rather than insist only on posting of wildlife trained personnel in wildlife areas. In many cases, non-trained personnel perform better than wildlife trained personnel. However, we could encourage that trained officers should be posted in wildlife areas.

The Member Secretary accepted that fund shortage for WII was an issue, but also informed that MoEF had agreed to give an additional amount of Rs. 2 crores in the current year (2011-12) to WII.

Thereafter, the Chairperson while agreeing to the suggestions of the official and non-official members added that she would start by making serious communications to the State Chief Ministers to enhance the staff strength of wildlife wing/department, and to train them in wildlife management and conservation within next 3 years. She suggested that there can be a mechanism by which it could be monitored also. A time limit of 2 to 3 years could be given to the State Governments for compliance.

The Standing Committee unanimously agreed to the suggestion of the Chairperson.

4. Declaration of Kolamarka Sanctuary

Dr Ranjitsinh expressed the need and importance of declaring Kolamarka as a Sanctuary in place of the area de-notified in Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary in Maharashtra. He said that Kolamarka was an important habitat of the critically endangered wild buffaloes in India, which are the wild counterparts of the most domesticated animals in the world.

Shri Kishor Rithe speaking in the same context informed that 8,496.44 sq. Km of the Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary was de-notified and reduced to 1,222.61 sq. Km. This has resulted in the Protected Area percentage of Maharashtra declining drastically from 4.97% to 2.6% (from 15,332 sq. Km to 8,058 sq. Km). Therefore, the Protected Area network should be increased in the State. He stated that the State should consider the potential wildlife areas suggested by WII as well as by the members of SBWL and NBWL for being declared as Protected Areas. He also mentioned that, earlier two areas were identified, viz, Kolamarka and Mansinghdeo for being notified as wildlife sanctuaries.

Although, Mansinghdeo has been notified as a Sanctuary now, but Kolamarka was still to be notified.

The Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) of Maharashtra said that out of the 8,000 Sq. Km of Bustard Sanctuary, 4,100 Sq. Km was private land. The Bustards were found only in 800 Ha in the sanctuary, and also that most of these were found outside the sanctuary. Therefore, after the site visits and discussions, an area of 1,220 Sq.Km was retained as Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary. To compensate the denotified area, Mansinghdeo was notified as Sanctuary. With respect to Kolamarka, which incidentally was impacted by left-wing extremism, the CWLW stated that the decision to notify the area as a sanctuary was yet to be taken pending a comprehensive appraisal of the situation in the area. He also mentioned that the local people had the general perception that notification of an area as Protected Area would affect development and economic growth of the region. Similarly, even in this area, people were resenting the proposal to declare a Sanctuary in the area. He added that despite all odds, wildlife staff was doing its best to protect wildlife in the area. He suggested that the habitat of the wild buffalo may be declared as Conservation Reserve for now, which would give it better protection, and also serve the purpose of conserving the wild buffalo in the interim.

Shri Kishor Rithe said that we cannot just make the resentment of people as an excuse for not notifying the area as a sanctuary. He suggested adoption of community based approach for management of the sanctuary with money being routed through the village committees only. He added that it was true that the area was infested by naxals, which is a serious issue, but we cannot look away from the issue. He further said that there were also forest officers who were doing excellent forest protection work even in such difficult situation.

Ms. Prerna Bindra mentioned that the Kolamarka area was contiguous to the Indravati Tiger Reserve and that although the Reserve was also naxal impacted, there was presence of wild buffaloes and also report of tiger movement therein. This contiguity increases the significance of Kolamarka. Though the concerns of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Maharashtra could be appreciated, naxalism need not necessarily be an impediment to the creation of a sanctuary, and patient, proper dialogue with the local communities could pave the way for better conservation.

Dr Ranjitsinh said that wild buffaloes have immense religious and social significance in general and particularly for the local tribals and communities living there. Any such initiatives that are carried out for protection of this symbol of their culture, the local tribals and people would happily come forward to protect the animal themselves.

The Member-Secretary suggested that Dr Ranjitsinh, Shri Kishor Rithe and the Chief Wildlife Warden, Maharashtra could have discussions on this issue and come up with a report on declaration of Kolamarka a Conservation Reserve or a Sanctuary. Chairperson said that the matter would be taken up with the Chief Minister, Maharashtra also, once the

report of the members and CWLW was received. The Standing Committee agreed to the proposal.

5. Implementation Protocol on Critical Wildlife Habitats to be approved by Standing Committee

The Member Secretary informed the committee that the draft protocol had already been put up on the Ministry's website for one month, and the comments had been sought. After incorporation of the relevant comments, the draft protocol had been forwarded to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) seeking their concurrence/comments. Response was still awaited from the MoTA.

Shri Kishor Rithe said that Critical Wildlife Habitats are created under FRA 2006 with respect to "Protected Areas" declared under WPA 1972 as amended in 2006 and whatever guidelines are framed regarding critical wildlife habitats will have positive or negative effects on the Protected Areas too. Therefore, these guidelines should be placed before the Standing Committee of the NBWL prior to implementation in the PAs.

It was decided that the draft protocol would be circulated amongst the Members, and their views would be communicated to the MoTA.

Agenda Item No. 2.2: Proposed by Dr Biswajit Mohanty

1. Declaration of ESA

Shri Biswajit Mohanty requested to keep this agenda in abeyance. This was agreed to by the Standing Committee.

2. Elephant Electrocution Deaths

Shri Biswajit Mohanty mentioned that good work was being done by the Forest Department to prevent deaths of elephants due to electrocution and that the Forest Department was also cracking down on the electricity companies and departments who were violating the guidelines of Central Electricity Authority (CEA) for maintenance of transmission lines. He suggested that a sub-committee could be formed, including the members of NBWL, which would look into this issue and assess the level of implementation of the existing guidelines of CEA for safety mechanisms like 'circuit breakers' to be incorporated in rural electrification distribution systems to protect the elephants.

The Chief Wildlife Warden, Orissa mentioned that the State had been dealing with the electricity board and companies on the issue of electrocution of elephants very seriously and taking various steps to deal with the issue. One such step was to disconnect the electricity supply during the movement of the elephants. Several violators had also been arrested. Further 20 circuit breakers had also been installed across the State in elephant

habitats. He suggested that funds could be provided under CAMPA for this purpose and also requested the Ministry to help the State in booking cases against such 'Discoms' since the Forest Department can only arrest individuals and not take legal action against violating electricity companies, for which he sought help and direction from the Central Government. The Chief Wildlife Warden further added that the scheme 'Rajiv Gandhi Vidyutikaran Yojna', was complicating the problem as sub-standard work was being done in the rural areas, under this scheme which would endanger lives of wild animals further. According to him, the electricity department was aware of the faulty work, but attributed same to the paucity of funds for such work. He requested the Ministry to strongly recommend to the State to take measures for fulfilling all the norms and to avoid sub-standard work. He added that he had even arrested people working under this scheme for violating the norms and guidelines.

Dr Shankar Raman said that the issue extended beyond Odisha, and across the region and the species. Other animals too were suffering due to electrocution. Further, the Electricity Act suggests proper laying of cables for different purposes, and the Rules prescribe heights to be maintained over buildings and houses, but specifications for lines passing through forest/wildlife areas are lacking and can be introduced. On these lines, the cables can also be laid following appropriate technology in and around wildlife habitats and ecological corridors, which would not endanger the lives of the wild animals. He also informed that discussions were held with the state authorities and even a detailed presentation on the issue was made before the Committee. He said that draft guidelines for proper laying of transmission lines and roads through and around PAs was circulated to the members during the 23rd Meeting of the Standing Committee, but could not be discussed for want of time. He requested that the Standing Committee could take up the draft guidelines for discussion during its next meeting.

Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh added that there were also instances of local people, especially in locations prone to crop depredation by elephants, illegally connecting the powerline to barbed-wire fences resulting often in the death of tuskers leading to gradual decline in their number due to this type of killing and poaching.

Dr Divyabhanusinh Chavda mentioned that the height of the electric transmission wires are already stipulated and needed to be abided by strictly by the 'Discoms'.

Dr Ranjitsinh informed that people cut the electric wires to electrocute and trap wild boars but elephants and other animals become the accidental victims.

The DGF&SS added that it was a complicated issue since it was more related to human-wildlife conflict. Central Government could think of giving more money to the States so that they could strengthen the electricity infrastructure on their own and not depend on the private companies for the purpose.

However, the Member Secretary opined that it might not be a correct proposition to agree that the work done by the private companies was sub-standard, and therefore, the government should spend public money to correct the mistakes of others. Instead strong action should be taken against the private companies for doing such sub-standard work and not complying with their own guidelines for laying the transmission lines in an appropriate manner. He also expressed that installation of 20 'circuit breakers' as mentioned by the CWLW, Odisha, was grossly inadequate for the whole State.

The Chairperson suggested examining if it was possible for the Regional Offices of the MoEF to book cases against these companies, and stopping them from functioning. She also said that an advisory would be issued to all States after advice from the legal cell of the Ministry regarding this matter. The Chairperson requested the Chief Wildlife Warden, Odisha to submit a note on the issue of 'Rajiv Gandhi Vidyutikaran Yojana' and other related concerns on the basis of which further action in the matter could be taken by the Ministry.

This was agreed to by the Standing Committee.

3. Protection of wildlife and CAMPA work practices

Dr Ranjitsinh mentioned that money under this scheme is used for afforestation purposes. However afforestation may not always be beneficial for the ecosystem, as in many cases, the same was being done arbitrarily. Due to such practices, vital ecosystems like grasslands, scrub forests were getting replaced by monoculture plantation of little ecological value in and around Protected Areas. Therefore, such afforestation schemes should be done only after proper studies had been carried out on the ecology of the region on scientific principles. He also stressed that such afforestation should be done at appropriate places where it was not inimical to the local ecosystems.

He further stated that there should also be a provision under CAMPA for land acquisition to enable voluntary resettlement of people from Protected Areas and also for acquiring estates, corridors and such other places that were situated in crucial wildlife habitats.

The DGF&SS mentioned that provisions for resettlement of people from National Parks and Sanctuaries including Tiger Reserves already exist under CAMPA.

Shri Kishor Rithe reiterated the need to review the work done under CAMPA, and to take stock of the money allocated under this scheme with a view to ensuring synergy with the objectives of wildlife conservation in PAs.

The Member Secretary informed that it had already been decided that CAMPA funds could be utilized for relocation of people from PAs.

The Chairperson said that acquiring/buying land using CAMPA funds could sometimes become controversial. She also pointed out that the NBWL should write to the Chairman, CAMPA on this matter, and that it could be added to their agenda for the meeting of the CAMPA National Advisory Committee that would be held in January 2012.

This was agreed to by the Standing Committee.

Agenda Item No. 2.3: Proposed by Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh

1. to 7. Strengthening conservation measures in the southern Western Ghats

Dr Johnsingh highlighted the need to protect the southern Western Ghats region from the various developmental activities that according to him were detrimental to the local ecology. He said that that a pilgrimage tourism road coming up in South Periyar could have serious impacts on the wildlife of the region as it was an important elephant and tiger habitat. He added that elephants in Periyar landscape had been isolated from the population south of Ariankavu Pass for several decades, and, therefore, there was need to establish a corridor across the Pass to facilitate movement between the two isolated populations of elephants. He also stated that even within the landscape of Periyar, the elephants were getting isolated. He suggested that to protect the wildlife of the region, one or two important elephant and tiger corridors should be identified and notified for conservation. He also stressed the need to declare the Kuzhathupuzha and Palode Ranges as Conservation Reserves which was an area of priceless wildlife habitat and which along with Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR) would also enable the tigers to thrive in the forests south of the Ariankavu Pass. Dr Johnsingh emphasized the need to acquire the cardamom estates along the border with Tamil Nadu as well as within the KMTR to secure the wildlife habitats and the corridors.

The Member-Secretary, NTCA, informed that the Ministry had earlier written to the Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu about the issue relating to acquisition of estates along the interstate border of Periyar Tiger Reserve with Tamil Nadu. However, no reply has yet been received. Even the Cabinet Committee gave its approval for tiger areas as core areas, but the State had neither taken any action nor responded on the issue.

Dr Johnsingh brought to light that an important estate which needed to be acquired immediately was the Downton (Pachakanam) Estate in the heart of the Tiger Reserve. He said that the discussions for acquisition of this estate had been continuing for more than a decade, but without any fruitful outcome so far. He wanted the State Government to vigorously pursue the acquisition of this estate.

8. and 9. Saving ponds in Coimbatore and adjoining areas

Dr Johnsingh informed that ground water level had drastically declined in the area near Coimbatore, and therefore, it had become necessary to protect and save the water bodies in the city. He added that the local NGOs, such as Siruthuli were trying their best to

save these water bodies and ponds and generating awareness on the ecological importance of these water bodies. However, much more was required to be done. He invited the Chairperson to visit the areas as per her convenience.

Dr Shankar Raman said that there were very good models of restoring and protecting degraded water bodies across the country, including some efforts by Siruthuli in Coimbatore itself. The water bodies of the city can also be protected and rejuvenated following the successful restoration models experimented on other sites.

The Chairperson indicated that removing encroachments from around these ponds would be a very difficult task. She also stated that she was open to paying a field visit to Coimbatore to have a firsthand assessment of the issue on ground. She added that she would look into the matter and the Ministry could write to the State Government on this account. This suggestion was agreed to by the Standing Committee.

10. Taxonomical studies in India- need for a change in thinking

Dr Johnsingh requested that this agenda item may be taken as deferred. This was agreed to by the Standing Committee.

11. Proposal for Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary

Dr Johnsingh informed that Nandhaur area is a very good habitat for tigers and if protected, it can become as successful as Corbett National Park. Protection was crucial, as a particular local community inhabiting the area was known to indulge in hunting. He also added that Uttarakhand was experiencing high rate of development which was putting extreme pressure on the natural habitats and wildlife of the region. Therefore, it had become important to notify this area as a sanctuary as early as possible. He added that the present DFO in Haldwani had submitted a proposal to the State Government of Uttarakhand for notifying the Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary.

Ms Prerna Bindra agreed on the ecological importance of this habitat and on the potential of it as a tiger habitat. She informed the committee that according to information from the State, the Forest Advisory Committee had given approval of mining in some case, and one of the stipulated conditions for diversion of forest land in the said case, was that the Nandhaur Valley be declared a Sanctuary and Pawalgarh also be considered for a Sanctuary or Conservation Reserve. She further informed that the proposal of the Nandhaur sanctuary had been put forward by the concerned DFO and CCF and was with the Chief Wildlife Warden. She requested that if the Hon'ble Chairperson could write to the state authorities, it would expedite the issuance of the notification of Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary by the State Government.

The Chairperson agreed that she would write to the Chief Minister, Uttarakhand after getting details from FC Division of the Ministry on this issue.

The Committee agreed with the suggestion of the Chairperson.

Agenda item no. 2.4: Proposed by Ms. Prerna Bindra

1. and 2. Implementation protocol on Critical Wildlife Habitats to be approved by National Board for Wildlife and issues regarding Working and functioning of the Standing Committee

Ms. Prerna Bindra agreed that since these agenda items had already been discussed earlier, these may not be discussed again.

3. Dachigam National Park

Ms. Prerna Bindra said that the Dachigam National Park was the only refuge for Hangul deer, certainly the most critically endangered deer species of India and facing extinction unless urgent action was taken. However, the National Park was facing a number of issues which had not been resolved for decades. There were establishments and encroachments within the park like the sheep breeding farm, trout hatchery and rescue centre for leopards and bears whose area had been expanded without the mandated permission from NBWL. These intrusions have damaged the precious grasslands crucial to the Hangul. Several recommendations had been given to the State over many years but no action had been taken yet on this. Hangul is also one of the species identified for Recovery Programmes, and around Rs. 90 lakhs had been given to the State for the conservation of this endemic and endangered deer. She requested that urgent steps be taken to save the Hangul, and also asked whether there had been judicious spending of the money allocated under the Species Recovery Scheme for the purpose. She requested that this aspect should also be reviewed.

Dr Ranjitsinh further added that Dachigam was very crucial for Hangul deer. Hangul and Manipur deer are so highly threatened that they may become the first species to go extinct among the large mammals in India. Manipur deer population decreased drastically over the years but due to the steps taken by Manipur Government and the local people, situation for this species has improved slightly. But in case of Hangul, the State is not doing anything to protect this species. If Hangul becomes extinct, Jammu and Kashmir would be the first political region in the world to have lost its State emblem. He also said that even the Cabinet of Jammu and Kashmir had taken a decision to remove the encroachments and the sheep farm from in and around the National Park, but now on the contrary, the Animal Husbandry Department was planning to build a research centre for sheep breeding near the National Park, which would defeat the purpose of removing the sheep farm from the park.

The IGF (WL) mentioned that Dachigam suffers from some perennial problems such as encroachments, mining for limestone along the border, and sheep farms. Though initiatives were taken by the management to tackle these issues, but due to lack of alternate lands and additional funds, conclusive action could not be taken. He also mentioned about a fishery farm and the issue related to Bear and Leopard enclosures. He also recommended constituting a committee from amongst members of NBWL, MoEF, State Government and

WII for monitoring and advising the State Government for protection of Hangul as well as for taking stock of the funds extended by the MoEF to the State for this purpose.

The Director, WII mentioned that Hangul was also threatened by predation by leopards on its fawns. It requires well protected habitats, especially summer habitats to ensure its long-term survival, whereas on the contrary, in Upper Dachigam, which is its summer habitat there is immense disturbance by humans and the Hangul fawn fall prey to domestic dogs.

The Member Secretary suggested for having a small group to evaluate the utilization of money given by MoEF to the State, as well as to take up other related matters for ensuring recovery of the Hangul in Dachigam National Park, like the adverse impact of existing activities including mining around the Park and the proposal to open Sheep Research Centre in or around the Park.

The Chairperson agreed to the suggestion and informed that she would soon decide the constitution of the said committee. This was agreed to by the Standing Committee.

4. Non-compliance by NHAI of FAC conditions of a four-lane expressway (NH-54E) through the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong elephant and tiger corridor

Ms. Purna Bindra said that NHAI is constructing a four-lane expressway through the Lumding Reserve Forest in Assam. The highway will cut through a crucial migratory corridor for elephants, gibbons and gaur and also a critical tiger landscape.

The NHAI got permission to cut down over 100 hectares of forest for the expansion of NH-54E, with the preconditions laid down by FAC. She referred to reports in the media and informed that it was learnt that the NHAI has not adhered to any of these conditions and the underpasses made are not adequate for large animals like elephants to pass through. She said that NHAI had violated forests and wildlife laws, which was a serious concern. She pointed out other violation of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 by NHAI in construction of NH-6, and its lack of accountability. Agreeing with her, Shri Kishore Rithe endorsed the flagrant violation of the forest and wildlife laws by the NHAI, and wanted action to be taken against the NHAI.

Shri Kishor Rithe said that NHAI was under obligation to consider and address resettlement of people, wildlife issues and other related matters. They cannot avoid these important issues, and go on completing 20 Km of roads per day. He said that it was the duty of the Chief Wildlife Wardens to take action against, and inform the concerned authorities of NHAI. He added that when he drew the attention of the Chief Wildlife Warden to the violations by NHAI, the former simply said that he had not received any formal complaints from the local people or anyone else. Shri Rithe said that we should not wait for the people to raise objections, but the CWLWs should take action as soon as any violation came to their notice. He also said that in serious cases of violation, the Ministry was also required to deal with the NHAI strictly. He further said that several cases had been

filed against NHAI already like the one relating to NH-6 passing through the corridor between Nagzira Sanctuary and Nawegaon National Park in Maharashtra and still no corrective action had been taken against the defaulting NHAI and forest department officers under FC Act 1980. He said that the Tiger corridor was being cut by the construction of the NH-6 highway in Maharashtra, but the NHAI was not taking adequate measures for mitigating the negative impacts on the landscape as suggested by wildlife authorities of Maharashtra.

Dr Johnsingh said that a similar issue in Uttarakhand had also come to the notice of the members. He stated that the highways passing through wildlife areas should remain two-lane with required number of speed breakers. However, according to him, there were no speed breakers in Uttarakhand due to which many animals get killed by vehicles.

Dr Shankar Raman said that he had prepared the draft guidelines on impacts of linear intrusions into the PAs like roads, transmission lines, etc which could be discussed in the next meeting. In specific cases like NH-54E, he suggested that experienced wildlife scientists working in the region (Assam) could be requested to work with, explain, and advise the NHAI and others involved in road construction work about the specific mitigation measures required for wildlife and also help monitor the progress and process of implementation thereof.

Ms Prerna Bindra submitted that roads through PAs and wildlife corridors had grave ecological impacts, and with demand for new roads and expansion of roads through Protected Areas, Critical Tiger Habitats and corridors coming up frequently, it was important that NHAI took on board the ecological concerns. She added that one could understand the imperative of building and expanding roads and highways network, but NHAI had very low credibility because of repeated violations. It would serve both conservation and the developmental imperatives, if the NHAI executed its projects with due diligence by following all stipulated conditions in a bid to restore faith in its credibility, within the NBWL and the conservation community in general and presented itself as a model that took on board critical ecological concerns.

The Chairperson suggested that the Secretary (E&F) would write to Chief Secretary of Assam State Government on this issue requesting the State Government to review whether the stipulations of FC clearance in respect of NH-54E were being complied with in letter and spirit, and in case of non-compliance, initiate action against the NHAI. She also suggested for initiating a dialogue with the highway authorities. She also volunteered to write to the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, highlighting the issues raised by the members and impressing on the Minister to ensure compliance of stipulations of FC clearance by the NHAI.

This was agreed to by the Standing Committee.

Agenda item no. 2.5: Proposed by Dr T.R. Shankar Raman

1. Contour canal in Anamalai Tiger Reserve (TR)

Dr Shankar Raman mentioned that 49.3 Km contour canal in Anamalai TR was being repaired. He stressed that he was not against the important work as it was vital for irrigation needs of the region besides demonstrating how the Anamalai TR provided an important service of water for local people. However, local conservationists had raised concerns that the steep-sided canal was acting as a barrier or death-trap for wildlife, big and small, ranging from Asian elephants to smaller mammals, especially in those stretches that passed through the Tiger Reserve. The repair work provided an opportunity to implement simple mitigation measures to facilitate animal crossings and prevent their deaths due to drowning. Dr Shankar Raman, therefore, suggested that while the repair work did not need to be interrupted, a joint site visit by State Forest Department, Project Authorities, wildlife scientists and Standing Committee members could help identify specific locations and mitigation measures that could be implemented. The project required detailed study, and careful execution.

Dr Ranjitsinh suggested that a joint investigation of entire length of canal by a member of NBWL, local scientists, state government authorities, and project authorities should be done.

Dr Divyabhanusinh Chavda wanted to know whether such proposals relating to repair of canals passing through Protected Areas required consideration of the SC of NBWL before being started.

After discussions, the Committee decided that a team comprising Dr T.R. Shankar Raman, a representative of WWF-India, officials of State Forest Department, local scientists, and project officials of the State Irrigation Department, and Public Works Department should visit the area, and submit a report to the Standing Committee. Dr Divyabhanusinh Chavda informed that he would be intimating the representative of WWF-India, and subsequently intimated that Dr A.J.T. Johnsingh would represent WWF-India on the above team.

The Committee also decided that the Secretary (E&F) would also write to the Chief Secretary, Tamil Nadu on this issue to facilitate the visit by the team.

Agenda item no. 2.6: Proposed by Shri Kishor Rithe

1. and 3. Denotification of GIB Sanctuary, Maharashtra and Implementation of FRA, 2006

Shri Rithe said that as these items had been discussed earlier, these may not be discussed again.

2. Satpura landscape in central India

Shri Kishor Rithe said that the tigers and wildlife were getting badly affected due to existence of irrigation canals, highways, and mines in the corridors in the Satpuda landscape, and that GIS based studies were urgently needed to protect and conserve the wildlife. He further said that although the related matter had already been discussed under the agenda item dealing with violations by the NHAI, he would reiterate that strong action was required by the MoEF against the NHAI to compel it to comply with the FC clearance stipulations.

Agenda item no. 2.7: Proposed by Dr M. D. Madhusudan

Agenda item no. 2.8: Proposed by members of NBWL

The Committee decided that since the issues raised by the members in the two agenda items, viz., 2.7 and 2.8, had already been covered during the discussions earlier in the meeting, and appropriate decisions taken, there was no need to discuss the same issues again.

Thereafter, the Chairperson suggested that if the Committee agreed, it could take up discussion on the Demwe Hydroelectric Project before taking up other agenda items. This was agreed to by the Committee members.

Agenda item No. 3.3.1: Construction of 1,750 MW Demwe Lower HE project in Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh

The Member Secretary informed the Committee that the Standing Committee had discussed this agenda item in its last meeting held on 14th October 2011 wherein it was decided that a site inspection would be conducted by Dr Asad Rahmani, Member, Standing Committee of NBWL and Shri Pratap Singh, CCF (WL), Arunachal Pradesh. He also informed that the said team had inspected the site and had given two separate reports. He further added that both the reports had been circulated amongst the SC members together with a note received from the PCCF and Principal Secretary, Forest Department of Arunachal Pradesh.

Thereafter, the Chairperson requested for comments on the reports of Dr Rahmani and Shri Pratap Singh. She also mentioned that the area was of strategic importance, and already a sizable investment of scientific, technical and financial inputs had gone into the project. The Chairperson then suggested that the PCCF and Principal Secretary (Environment), Government of Arunachal Pradesh offer his comments first.

The brief of the submissions made by the PCCF and Principal Secretary (Environment), Government of Arunachal Pradesh on Dr Rahmani's report is given below:

"1. The Lower Demwe HEP has 26 percent equity from Arunachal Pradesh Government, and after 40 years will revert to the State. On commissioning, more than 15% of the power will be available free of cost to the State Government.

2. This is the first dam on any of the three major rivers of Arunachal Pradesh (AP), namely, Siang, Dibang and Lohit. Also, of the so called 147 HEPs planned in AP, so far only 4 dams have been accorded final clearance or are under construction even though the hydro power development started in Arunachal Pradesh more than 25 years ago. AP is estimated to have about 40% of the hydropower potential of the country.

3. The fact that the matter is before this High Powered Committee, is because the dam is within 8.5 Km of the Sanctuary and the reservoir within 50 meters of the sanctuary against an Eco Sensitive zone of 100 meters upstream of the dam. But for this fact, the forestry clearance to the project would probably have been accorded. However, committee in its wisdom has asked for a study which only covers downstream impact of the project right down up to Dibru Saikhowa 105 Km. away from the dam. By saying so, I am not questioning the decision of the Standing Committee but just to set the records straight.

4. While conceding the need to protect our rich biodiversity, it must be understood that it cannot be protected by alienating people. Can we look beyond animal and plant biodiversity and think of people who are as much a part of the same biodiversity? The people in Arunachal Pradesh are getting increasingly frustrated at the delay in clearance of developmental projects on the ground of environment, forest and wildlife clearances. Do the members here know that there are instances where people in AP have started cutting the best forests on community lands in the name of jhumming just to avoid seeking forestry and wildlife clearances, and thereby get the rural roads and other developmental projects that they want and also compensation for the land diverted? Should we not be a little more sensitive particularly in a state like AP which is strategically located?

5. WAPCOS study (Nov.2011) has brought out that the peaking flow of 1,729 cumecs attenuates to 550 cumecs at Dibru Saikhowa- 105 Km downstream. This results in the rise in water level only of 25 cm. Therefore, it is safe to assume that this increase in water level during peaking hours will not cause any significant impact on wildlife or its habitat in the Park. The lowest level of the Park is 2-7 meters above the water level during peaking flows.

6. The chaporis by their very definition do not generally get flooded during monsoon floods. Therefore, to assume that they will get flooded during the peaking discharge of 1,729 cumecs- which is almost one fourth of the peak monsoonic flows is fallacious.

7. Most of the chaporis in Arunachal Pradesh are under Unclassed State Forest (community land) and as a result, no formal system of management is in place. There are anthropogenic pressures like grazing, temporary dairies and even seasonal cultivation. The grasslands in chaporis are threatened with possible vegetational and ecological changes more due to these pressures than the change in moisture regime during the peaking flows.

8. As per Dr Wakid's study, there are no records of sighting of Gangetic dolphin upstream of Tenganimukh. At this point, 90 cumecs of non-monsoonic flow is also available from Noa Dihing. Besides, there are several other tributaries/streams joining the Lohit downstream and would, therefore contribute to lean season flows during non peaking hours. Also, Dr Wakid's study pertains to Lohit River whereas Dr Biswas's study is for Subansiri River-a totally different aquatic habitat. To draw reference to Biswas's study for Lohit will not be scientifically correct. Also, any further study will only delay the project in the name of a fresh study.

9. MPCA has been identified in that area but its size has not been decided. It certainly is not 1,600 ha but will be limited to about 150-200 Ha. As per the inventorization carried out by NERIST, no RET species are present but only some globally significant MAPs exist in the area.

10. The report has suggested like change in vegetation due to improved moisture due to peaking flows with the habitat becoming less favorable for Bengal Florican (in chaporis) but has also felt that this may become more favourable for other species of birds and animals. This is a trade off. We have to make therefore choices. And this can be done by bringing these areas under some formal management.

11. The apprehension that soil erosion will be caused during peaking releases is also misplaced because the peaking release of 1,729 cumecs at the dam site attenuates downstream and would in any case be almost $1/3^{rd}$ to $1/4^{th}$ of the monsoonic volume. The river channel having stabilized during monsoon would not get eroded with flows with the river bed covered with boulders, pebbles and sand.

12. The report has questioned the wisdom of linking economic development of AP to this project. That however is not true. But the apprehension is that if this project is denied clearance due to downstream issues, other projects on rivers in AP will meet the same fate, as we have chaporis all along the foothills and flood plains. This virtually amounts to declaring these rivers as "no go" areas for hydropower development.

13. There are choices to be made in what development we want to pursue. It is nobody's case that there will be zero impact downstream. But will it be catastrophic or can we mitigate it through management interventions? Dibru Saikhowa itself has huge encroachments. Is that not causing greater amount of damage? Also, the chaporis, in fact in most cases they are a no man's land, and therefore, there is a free for all kind of situation there. Does that not require more attention? Also will the climate change not impact bird habitats and, therefore, their distribution? In this, Hydropower being a cleaner alternative

than say Thermal are we not mitigating adverse impact on birds, animals and the biodiversity in general.”

Hon’ble Chairperson then requested the non-official members to offer their comments.

Dr M.K. Ranjitsinh said that a proponent will never disclose all the cons of his project. He claimed that Demwe was not a transboundary river between Tibet and Arunchal Pradesh. He said that proponent will always try to prove the benefits of his project. He added that in case of run-of-the- river projects, often the project proponent will get the lower dam approved, and later would come with the plea that this dam would not be viable enough, to serve its purpose if other dams were not built upstream of the lower dam. However, we may give strong communication to the proponents that approval would only be given to their project if they would not use the currently proposed dam as the basis for building other dams. Similar, condition was made in case of Subansiri HEP. He also pointed out that eastern Himalayas were extremely prone to earthquakes but the WAPCOS in its report had only devoted half-paragraph on the seismicity and measures to prevent damage in case of earthquakes. He said that since Dr Rahmani was not present, decision on the agenda may be taken later. He added that the fluctuating water level would also adversely affect the nesting sites of birds and harm their eggs. He also asked if the State Government was ready to certify that they would not come up with any HEP proposals for the next fifty years on this river. He expressed his disagreement with the proposal.

Dr Shankar Raman fully endorsed Dr Rahmani’s report. At the outset, he said that it was a pity that in this country, projects of such magnitude and serious impacts were carried out without proper, judicious planning, and being pushed in haste. He said that in principle they were not against all hydro-electric projects, but the Demwe project in particular had serious impacts on the ecology, wildlife and also livelihood and other concerns in upstream and downstream sections including Kamlang Sanctuary and down up to at least Dibru Sikhowa National Park. Locating such a project in such close proximity to and leading to submergence of Parasuram Kund, a culturally important site, was also a serious matter, and was linked to local sentiments. The upstream area to be affected included a conservation priority site identified by the Arunachal Pradesh Government itself in its State Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP). He said that the dam would have serious impacts on the downstream ecosystems and important species such as dolphins, Bengal florican, white-winged wood duck and others as highlighted in Dr Rahmani's report.

In response to the PCCF’s statement that downstream impacts on dolphins had been expressed citing the unrelated example of impacts of the 2,000 megawatt, Lower Subansiri Project, he explained that this was a normal acceptable practice. In case, if there was no time to conduct a full-fledged study, this project could be studied by comparing it with other similar studies done on similar projects previously, or ecologically comparable rivers in the region which was an accepted norm in ecological studies, so citing example of Subansiri impacts, and drawing conclusions therefrom for possible impacts due to Lower Demwe project was in order.

In response to the non sighting of dolphins upstream of Tengapanimukh in the river, he pointed out that the study referred was conducted during a very brief period, and no detailed study across all seasons has yet been carried out. This point has already been made in Dr Rahmani's report.

Dr Shankar Raman also added that the cumulative impacts of the various HEPs are one of the mandates with respect to wildlife habitats. In the absence of such cumulative impact studies, which also include cumulative impacts on wildlife through field research across relevant seasons by competent professionals, it is inadvisable for the Standing Committee to clear such proposals. He also mentioned that the comment that there will be only 25 cm variation in water level needs to be critically examined in this context as the cumulative impact of water variation when several projects are in operation will be of the order of several feet.

Further, he also mentioned that WAPCOS never itself visited the sites and had in fact done no field work including in Dibru Saikhowa as determined by Dr Rahmani in his report. The WAPCOS impact study had been done with computer modeling looking primarily at water level variation ignoring many other variables of importance for study of riverine ecosystems as well as ecological needs of fish and other aquatic organisms. He added that there would be severe impacts of diurnal water fluctuations, and the rate at which water would be released especially during hydropeaking and dry season operations, causing siltation, erosion, change in riparian habitats, and adverse impact on a range of aquatic and benthic organisms including endangered species such as the dolphins. He mentioned that there would be serious impacts due to daily peak variations with 1,729 cumecs every single day for about 90 days. He added that an area upstream of the dam, coming in the submergence zone, had been notified as Parashuram Kund Medicinal Plant Conservation Area (MPCA) for medicinal plant conservation. In response to the PCCF's comment that jhumming was destroying forests in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh, he asserted that even taking into account research in north-east India on the effects of shifting cultivation on forests and wildlife, shifting cultivation was still a more acceptable option than submergence of a whole forest under a 23 Km long reservoir and loss of such forest including the MPCA was not at all acceptable. He added that the Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) should also be consulted before arriving at the decision.

Dr Shankar Raman also commented that the report of Mr Pratap Singh lacked substantive argument and seemed to be suggesting that the project be cleared and any required research on impacts or on mitigation of detrimental effects may be done subsequently. He said that this is a wrong approach to environmental impact assessment and mitigation, and violates the precautionary principle. He also noted that the Standing Committee should seriously consider impacts on wildlife to reach a decision. He finally stressed his disagreement with the proposal and requested that, as recommended in Dr Rahmani's assessment report, the project should not be accorded clearance.

Dr Johnsingh said that by saying no to this particular project did not mean that we were opposed to every other project. This project was located at the transition zone between lower and higher elevations due to which the location was extremely ecologically sensitive and important. The project would have serious impacts on both upstream and downstream areas in Assam where hundreds of families may be practising dry season agriculture on the riverbeds, and therefore, should not be allowed.

Ms Prerna Bindra said that she endorsed Dr Rahmani's report and as recommended by Dr Rahmani's assessment report, the project should not be accorded clearance. In response to the comment made by the Arunachal State authorities, she said that it was not fair to say that the NBWL members were opposed to every project; on the contrary, the members judged each project on its merit. The mandate of the wildlife board was to consider the impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitats, and from that point of view, this project could not be allowed, as the impacts were very grave. She pointed out that it was in recognition of this fact that the FAC has sought the opinion of the NBWL Standing Committee as per the letter dated March 2011. Further, the Committee was not mentioning or talking about impact of the dam on livelihoods and communities although these were of crucial concern, and must be considered, as there had been submissions from many local communities both from Assam and Arunachal. The submergence of Parasuram Kund, a culturally important site, was also a serious matter, and was linked to local sentiments. She stressed that the downstream impacts were of serious nature, and that is why the National Appellate Authority had passed an interim order dated May 3, 2010 wherein it has directed the MoEF to ask the NBWL Standing Committee to examine downstream impacts on river dolphins and Important Bird Areas. The dam would impact many critically endangered species like the dolphin, Bengal florican, wild buffalo, and tiger, etc. besides Dibru-Saikhowa National Park (which is also part of the Eastern Himalayas Biodiversity Hotspot), and the chaporis.

Responding to the fact that the proposal was only before the committee on the basis of the fact that it was 8.5 Km from the Kamlang Sanctuary, Ms. Prerna Bindra pointed out that this was not correct information as the site of the reservoir, if the dam came up was mere 50 mts away from the Sanctuary and also that the project was, or should be, before committee given the various grave wildlife concerns. She also said that 'loss to one wildlife and advantage to another by way of a reservoir' as suggested by the State did not stand merit as each ecosystem had its own value, and flooding the forest was not of advantage to wildlife. She also added that the project had serious ecological impacts which needed to be looked into very carefully. She also suggested that Aaranyak, which was also a member of the NBWL, had submitted the downstream impact assessment study report, and had pointed out that the impact would reach as far as the Kaziranga and Manas Tiger Reserve, and therefore, the matter may also be referred to the NTCA. She said that given that about 13 hydropower projects are proposed in the Lohit river basin, with seven of these proposed projects on main Lohit River itself a cumulative assessment of the impacts must be undertaken and based on all these parameters, a decision could be taken on the project.

Shri Kishore Rithe said that such projects came again and again in NBWL, but we should learn from our experience in Subansiri project. He suggested that it was needed to consider the downstream impact of the Subansiri project which was still underway from all angles before taking a view on the instant Demwe project. He also added that the issue was still sub-judice, and as he had received complaints on violations, he would not support this project, and categorically expressed his disagreement to the proposal.

Dr Divyabhanusinh said that he had thoroughly and meticulously read both reports, and fully endorsed Dr Rahmani's report. He said that given the grave ecological and wildlife impacts, he could not put his signature to this project.

In response to the points mentioned by Dr Ranjitsinh, it was clarified by the PCCF and Principal Secretary (Environment), Arunachal Pradesh that:

- a) *Lohit river flows through Tibet and India and not limited to Indian Himalayas only.*
- b) *This Run-of-the-River Project does not have any linkage with any other project for its technical or financial viability.*
- c) *The Lower Subansiri Dam is designed to withstand earthquake of 8 degree on richter scale. I believe similar safeguards would have been provided in this project also. In any case this would have been kept in view while according environmental clearance.*

In response to points mentioned by Dr Shankar Raman, he clarified that:

- a) *The dam is separated from Kamlang WL sanctuary by a 6,000 feet high ridge and will therefore be relatively free from adverse impacts. This was also accepted by Dr Rahmani during the field study.*
- b) *The cultural site of Parasuram Kund will be safeguarded and uninterrupted water released during Makar Sankranti.*
- c) *MPCA site is not yet notified and will be about 200 ha and not 1,600 ha as pointed out by Dr Rahmani. In any case this area does not have any red listed medicinal plants as per IUCN criterion. The proposed MPCA in Parshuram Kund is at 576 Metres above MSL whereas the highest reservoir level is 424.8 metres above MSL, and therefore the MPCA does not fall within submergence area.*

The PCCF and Principal Secretary (Environment), Arunachal Pradesh urged the Committee to clear the project being the first one on any of the three major rivers of the State, namely, Dibang, Siang and Lohit.

The Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF), Eastern Circle, Arunachal Pradesh informed the Committee that team comprising Dr Asad Rahmani and Shri Pratap Singh inspected the proposed Demwe dam site near Parashuram Kund on 26th November 2011 along with forest officials and representatives of Developer, and Dr Rahmani, after

observing quite high ridge on left bank of Lohit River, realized that Kamlang Sanctuary was not accessible or approachable from that side. It was also informed that owing to deep gorge and topographical features, movement of wild animals near dam site was not possible. CCF, Eastern Circle also informed that most of chaporis of Lohit River were part of Unclassed Forests/Community Land and during visit of chapori by boat on 27th November 2011 when team landed on one chapori consisting of mixed vegetation of grassland and forest stated to be sighting place of Bengal Florican, Dr Rahmani also indicated this to be an inappropriate habitat for Bengal Florican.

However, when Shri Mridu Phukan, related to some NGO of Assam, who also accompanied Dr Rahmani, mentioned about grassland located at Panbari near Tezu township, the team visited that place also during afternoon and it was observed to be a suitable habitat for Bengal Florican. During this visit when DFO, Lohit Forest Division indicated that Panbari area was not part of Lohit River basin and falls under Anchal Reserve Forest, and that he was likely to take up that area for plantation, Dr Rahmani advised him not to destroy such good grassland by raising plantation. While appraising about biodiversity of Arunachal Pradesh, CCF stated that he never came across any report about presence of dolphin in Lohit River either in present tenure or earlier posting in that part of Arunachal Pradesh. CCF also mentioned that Demwe Lower HEP was the only project which did not have any opposition from local people in Arunachal Pradesh.

The Chairperson thanked the non-official members for their comments, and also the State Government officials for their comments and clarifications. She further said that she will look into all the comments and views of the members of the committee, and then take an appropriate decision on the agenda item. She, however, remarked that the matter could not be delayed any further.

Agenda item No. 3.1: Supreme Court case regarding Sigur Elephant Corridor, Tamil Nadu

The Member Secretary informed the Committee that a Special Leave Petition regarding the Sigur Elephant Corridor in Tamil Nadu had been referred to the Standing Committee of NBWL by the Hon'ble Supreme Court for its opinion. He suggested for constituting a sub-committee comprising Ms. Prerna Bindra, Shri S.S. Bisht, PCCF West Bengal, and former Director Project Elephant, MoEF, and Dr Madhusudan to visit the site, and submit a report for consideration of the Standing Committee to enable the NBWL formulate its response on the reference from the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

Dr Divyabhanusinh Chavda mentioned that he had gone through the entire report of the Expert Committee constituted by the High Court of Madras. He said that there was a whole gamut of processes, viz, PILs being filed before the Hon'ble High Court, High Court constituting an Expert Committee, consideration of the report of the Expert Committee by the Hon'ble High Court, orders passed by the Hon'ble High Court, etc., and speaking for other non-official members he said that all were in agreement on the matter and that what new thing would emerge from this proposed sub-committee of the Standing Committee

was not clear and, therefore, there was no need for such a sub-committee at all and that they were in complete agreement with the findings of the Expert Committee.

The Member Secretary, however, expressed reservation on the interpretation of Dr Divyabhanusinh of the issue, and insisted that the site visit by the proposed team would only bring a holistic and impartial picture of the sensitive matter before the Standing Committee to enable it to take a considered view in the matter.

The agenda could not be deliberated further for want of time, and the Chairperson opined that she needed time to study the whole issue carefully and then take a view. She also advised that in the meanwhile, Hon'ble Supreme Court may be requested to grant extension of time for filing response by the NBWL on this matter. She also suggested that the matter could be discussed in the next meeting.

At this juncture, the Chairperson sought leave from the meeting as she had to attend to a very important matter listed in the Parliament. She said that the remaining agenda items could be discussed in the next meeting.

The meeting thereafter ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

ANNEXURE-1**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING THE MEETING OF THE 24TH MEETING
OF STANDING COMMITTEE OF NBWL HELD ON 13TH DECEMBER 2011**

| | | |
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| 1 | Smt.Jayanthi Natarajan Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment and Forests. | Chairperson |
| 2 | Shri T. Chatterjee Secretary (E&F) | Invitee |
| 3 | Dr P.J.Dilip Kumar DGF&SS | Member |
| 4 | Dr Jagdish Kishwan Addl. Director General of Forests (WL) and Director, Wildlife Preservation. | Member- Secretary |
| 5 | Dr M.K. Ranjitsinh | Member |
| 6 | Dr Divyabhanusinh Chavda | Member |
| 7 | Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh | Member |
| 8 | Ms. Prerna Bindra | Member |
| 9 | Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai | Member |
| 10 | Shri T R Shankar Raman Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore | Member |
| 11 | Shri Kishor Rithe Satpuda Foundation, Amravati | Member |
| 12 | Shri P.R. Sinha Director, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun | Member |
| 13 | Shri Biswajit Mohanty, Member, NBWL | Invitee |
| 14 | Dr Rajesh Gopal, Member Secretary, NTCA | Invitee |
| 15 | Shri A.K. Srivastava Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife) | Invitee |

| | | |
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| 16 | Shri B.S. Sajawan PCCF and Secretary (E&F), Government of Arunachal Pradesh | Invitee |
| 17 | Dr S.K.Khetrapal, PCCF and Chief Wildlife Warden, Maharashtra | Invitee |
| 18 | Shri S.K. Goel PCCF and Chief Wildlife Warden, Gujarat | Invitee |
| 19 | Shri J.D. Sharma PCCF and Chief Wildlife Warden, Orissa | Invitee |
| 20 | Shri Yogesh Chief Conservator of Forests (Biodiversity) Government of Arunachal Pradesh | Invitee |
| 22 | Ms. Prakriti Srivastava Deputy Inspector General (WL) | Invitee |
| 23 | Shri Prabhat Tyagi Joint Director (WL) | Invitee |
