

Minutes of the meeting chaired by the Chief Secretary on 05/04/2022 to discuss the environmental status of wetlands including Ashtamudi & Vembanad kole wetlands, in the wake of order dated 28/02/2022 in OA No. 147/2022 (PZ) of the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal

The meeting commenced at 02:00 pm with the Chief Secretary presiding. The meeting was attended by the Additional Chief Secretaries of Local Self Government and Health & Family Welfare Departments, Secretary, Water Resources Department, Chairman, Kerala State Pollution Control Board, Chairman, Kerala State Bio Diversity Board, Directors of Environment & Climate Change, Industries & Commerce, Urban Affairs, Panchayats and Health Services, Commissioner, Land Revenue, Managing Director, Kerala Water Authority (KWA), Member Secretary, State Wetland Authority (SWAK), Member Secretary, Kerala Coastal Zone Management Authority, Secretary, Kollam Corporation and other officers concerned.

The allegations made in the OA No. 147/2022 (PZ) is mainly the pollution issues of wetlands (including Ramsar sites) and connected waterbodies in the State. The Tribunal vide order dated 28/02/2022 has directed the Chief Secretary to call a meeting of Departments concerned / District Administration / SWAK / KCZMA to take stock of the situation.

At the outset Chief Secretary welcomed all to the meeting and asked SWAK to detail on the issues concerned with wetlands in the State. MS, SWAK made a presentation on the relevant provisions in the Acts/Rules now being enforced for protection of wetlands and the orders issued by the State Government for preventing pollution of wetlands. It was conveyed during the meeting that though wetlands (other than Ramsar sites) have to be notified in the State, action is already in place for protection of waterbodies / wetlands areas from pollution sources. The

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974, Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and the various Rules framed thereunder are already in force for effective management of pollution from various sources / various categories of wastes. MS, SWAK further informed that activities which are prohibited in Ramsar sites & notified wetlands under the section 4 (2) of the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 include solid waste dumping, setting up of industries, discharge of untreated wastes and effluents from industries, cities, towns, villages & other human settlements, poaching etc. State Government has issued a circular No. A2/162/2019/Envvt dated 16/10/2019 in this regard and has entrusted local bodies such as Grama Panchayats, Municipalities and Corporations with watch and ward at the local level to ensure the enforcement of Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017.

Chairman, KSPCB informed that the industrial units in the State are brought under the consent regime of the Board and are being monitored routinely for compliance to consent conditions. No direct discharge of trade effluents from industries is permitted under the Water Act. Chairman conveyed that the waste water/septage from the households are also to be treated properly and dumping of solid wastes/ septage / sewage has to be curbed for which there has to be decentralised / centralised facilities to be set up and made functional by the local bodies, one of the prime constitutional responsibilities of the local bodies being effective management of wastes.

Following decisions were taken after the detailed discussions and deliberations:

1. Notification of wetlands:

MS, SWAK informed that the draft list of 40 wetlands has been prepared and that for finalization of the same consultation with LSGIs is needed. Chief

Secretary observed that the Wetland Rules were issued in 2017 and hence further delay in notifying wetlands is not appropriate and directed MS, SWAK that action shall be taken to speed up the process for notification of wetlands in the State.

(Action: ENVT, LSGD, WRD, SWAK)

2. Septage Treatment Plant and Waste to Energy plant for Kollam

Corporation:

Secretary, Kollam Corporation informed that construction activities of the Septage Treatment Plant at Kureeppuzha is taken up by Kerala Water Authority (KWA). Managing Director, KWA informed that 49 % works of CSTP, Kureeppuzha has already been completed and the remaining works are taken up and is being monitored regularly. MD, KWA also brought to the notice that the network connections from the households/commercial establishments are necessary for the effective functioning of the CSTP. However the works for network had to be retendered as there were no takers for the same. Chief Secretary pointed out the need to establish network connections simultaneously with the construction of the STPs to make its operation viable. ACS, LSGD opined that the possibility of identifying core areas for immediate network connectivity to CSTP along with supply through dedicated tankers for bringing in septage / sewage wastes from peripheral/outskirts areas needing immediate attention may be considered. If there are any existing networks undertaken as part of earlier projects, the viability of connecting the same to the CSTP may be considered. Chief Secretary directed to complete the activities connected with CSTP expeditiously. Works connected with waste to energy plant shall also be followed up by the concerned and action shall be taken to get the same implemented at the earliest. It was informed by ACS, LSGD that the Fire

NOC for the waste to energy project though informed to be cleared by the authority concerned has not been cleared so far due to technical reasons. Action shall be taken to speed up the clearance process. District Administration shall follow up the matter.
(Action: LSGD, WRD, KWA, DC)

3. Enforcement of the law and fining of polluters:

DDC, Kollam informed that regular meetings with the concerned departments/authorities is undertaken and actions are being reviewed periodically. As a result of monitoring several waste dumping hotspots were identified and surveillance cameras were installed at core areas to identify the polluters. Secretary, Kollam Corporation also informed that fine is being imposed on polluters. Chief Secretary directed the authorities concerned to impose penalties as per the provisions contained in Public Health Act, Panchayat Raj Act & Municipalities Act on polluters throwing garbage to waterbodies.

(Action: LSGD, ENVT, District Administration, KSPCB, Kollam Corporation, DMO, Health Dept)

4. Filing report before the Tribunal:

Vide order dated 28.02.2022 the Hon'ble Tribunal has directed the Departments / Authorities to file the respective action taken reports within 3 months. The Environment Department shall file a detailed report on behalf of the State after collecting necessary feedback from the Local Self Government Department, Water Resources Department, Health Department, Kerala State Pollution Control Board, Kerala State Wetland Authority and District Administration.

(Action: ENVT, Health, Water Resources Dept, LSGD, KSPCB, SWAK, DC)

The meeting come to an end by 02:45 PM

Dr. V. P Joy