

Overview of viewpoints on the “ **Public Consultation to strengthen Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)**” held on 29 January, 2010 in Puducherry

Around 100 Fisherfolk from 29 coastal Panchayats of Puducherry and Karaikal as well as nearby fishing villages of Tamil Nadu participated in the public consultation on Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) on 29 January, 2010 at Pondicherry. The consultation organized by Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Govt. of India was facilitated by Centre for Environment Education (CEE) at the Pondicherry Multipurpose Social Service Society (PMSSS).

Sharing the viewpoints, Mr. Gilbert Rodrigo and Mr. Anton Gomez highlighted the specific issues of the coastal areas and fishers rights. Mr. Elangovan showcased the plight of the villages along the northern coast of Pondicherry from Vembakirapalayam to Thandirayankuppam. The team from Pandy CAN presented a case study of the impact of unplanned development, especially ports, dykes and seawalls and the resulting coastal erosion and loss of habitat in the Puducherry coast. Fisherwomen raised concerns about marine pollution, livelihood protection and rights over their settlement areas. Leaders from the fishing Panchayats protested against the draft Marine Fisheries Regulation and Management Bill which restricts their rights to marine waters and resources. which restricts their rights to marine waters. They demanded that the drafting must be framed in consultation with the fishing community. Further, they questioned that why the Ministry of Agriculture which issued this draft bill as well as the Fisher Rights draft bill has not conducted a public consultation process as done by the MoEF for the CRZ notification. They were of the opinion to have an integrated approach amongst different ministries and departments in order to safeguard their interests and bring transparency in the policy decisions. They also protested against the current Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) project promoted by the World Bank which was framed without the involvement of fisher representatives. Fisher representatives from Kanyakumari raised concern that the current ‘vulnerability line’ mapping undertaken by Central Government should not become a reason to bring in regulations that restrict the fishers rights.

The major viewpoints that came up during the proceedings included; all the encroachments by non-fishers in the CRZ areas have to be removed; existing fishing settlement areas should not be disturbed and no restriction on its future expansion; the areas immediately surrounding the High Tide Line (HTL) should be reserved for use by the fishers; protective measures taken for coastal erosion should not disturb the coastal ecology and put fisher settlements and livelihoods in danger; the High Tide Line (HTL) must be constantly monitored; traditional panchayats must be consulted for development of any new projects along coastal areas; regulations under CRZ Notifications should be implemented and monitored locally through representation by fishers; there should be a provision for initiating criminal proceedings against violators; Ministry should initiate drafting of policies / regulations by facilitating a draft approach paper developed

through a consultative process with the local communities. This may then be taken up for drafting the legal framework / draft policy and then opened up for public debate / suggestions; there must be a moratorium against any new port or expansion of existing ports; there should be one Ministry that takes overall responsibility of all activities / policies related the coastal and marine environment and fishers lives and livelihoods and settlement areas.

Petitions from different fisher federations, Unions, CBOS, NGOs were also submitted. The meeting ended with the participants appreciating the efforts of MoEF to frame policy decisions through consultations with the stakeholders and hoped that the Union Minister, Shri Jairam Ramesh would be sensitive to their concerns while strengthening the CRZ notification and also take up their concerns with Agriculture and other related Ministries.

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