



FAC questions forest diversion proposals in dense forest and elephant corridor

The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC) in its meeting on 28 March 2019 considered 4 proposals involving 2379.564 ha of forest area. Out of the four proposals, two were deferred, one defence project for extension of lease period (DRDO for R&D purpose in Bhopal, MP) was recommended, and one previously recommended irrigation project (North Koel Dam in Jharkhand), was recommended for change of certain conditions.

One of the deferred proposals is for diversion of 383.37 ha in favour of Tata Steel Ltd for Noamundi Iron Ore Mine.

EIA Resource and Response Centre (ERC) has sent a representation to the FAC on this proposal raising the following issues.

Is this a No Go Area : In June 2018, MoEF&CC had come out with ‘a plan on ‘sustainable iron ore mining ’ in Jharkhand’s Saranda and Chaibasa, West Singhbhum district, and has proposed go and no-go zones, biodiversity hotspots and conservation areas to protect the region’s rich Sal forest and over 200 elephants. It has also accepted an annual cap of 64 million tonnes per annum in Saranda-Chaibasa, based on the expert report of Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education. ¹

Region Office (MoEF&CC) – Definite Adverse Impact on Wildlife² : The proposed area is part of Singhbhum Elephant Reserve. The entire forest area of the division falls under Singhbhum Elephant Reserve. According to the site inspection report by Regional Office of MoEF&CC at Ranchi, it has observed that elephants visit the area very frequently. The diversion will definitely have an adverse impact on the wildlife and lead to destruction of important wildlife habitat. According to Addl PCCF (Central) RO, Ranchi, the proposed

¹ <https://www.dnaindia.com/business/report-with-saranda-mining-plan-govt-aims-to-protect-sal-forests-and-over-200-elephants-2623686>

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http://forestsclearance.nic.in/writereaddata/AdditionalInformation/AddInfoSought/0_0_311261242121218652018.pdf

area is situated in the elephant sensitive zone bordering Odisha's Joda-Barbil area. It is near to the Karo-Karampada Elephant Corridor.

State Government Lying on Tree Number: Examination by the Ministry reveals that given the average number of 223.6 trees / ha, the total number of trees for the entire area should be 85,722 instead of 4472 as reported by the State Government. It's a 0.4-0.5 density forest.

It is apparent from the minutes of the meeting that FAC has taken note of most of the issues raised by ERC and directed studies to be undertaken.

On the tree issue, FAC observed that the enumeration should be done afresh and exact number of trees to be felled shall be reported. It was also proposed that the user agency shall provide the purpose wise breakup of the entire lease area.

On the wildlife issue, FAC observed that the proposed area forms a part of Singhbhum Elephant Reserve. It was observed that the local forest department perhaps failed to realize the importance of the proposed forest land by stating that "other wild animals like hare, noticed in the area in addition to the elephants visiting the area at times", which is incorrect and understatement of facts. Accordingly ministry may consider stipulating biodiversity status study through a government university and monitoring of criteria and indicators at regular interval. It was proposed that the state govt shall submit specific comments in this regard.

Another deferred proposal is for diversion of 390.264 ha of forest land in favour of Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL) for Bina-Kakri Open cast coal mining, under Singrauli Forest Division, MP.

EIA Resource and Response Centre (ERC) has sent a representation to the FAC on this proposal also raising policy issue of no more coal capacity is required in general, and the following issues in particular.

Trees to be felled – 630 /ha : A large no of trees is to be felled. The total no of trees to be felled is 2,45,462³. Canopy density is 0.4 and eco class is 5. Part of the forest is Reserved Forest. Area is primarily Sal mixed forest. Felling such large number of trees is detrimental and would surely affect the biodiversity of the region.

³ http://forestsclearance.nic.in/PartIIReport_A.aspx?pid=FP/MP/MIN/20225/2016

Elephant Corridor to be impacted: Some compartments under the proposed area comes under elephant corridor⁴ according to the site inspection report by CCF(Territorial). If the proposed open cast mine comes up then the elephant corridor would be disturbed.

FAC virtually copied some of the issues raised by ERC as follows.

On the tree issue FAC observed that 2, 45,462 trees are to be felled which comes out to be 630 trees/ha which is very high.

On the Wildlife issue FAC observed that the proposed area falls in Elephant corridor. The state government has been asked to give the justification for proposing the part of Elephant Corridor area for diversion.

Minutes of meeting can be accessed at:

http://forestsclearance.nic.in/writereaddata/FAC_Minutes/41118126121411.pdf

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http://forestsclearance.nic.in/writereaddata/0_0_03_May_2018_175529747_siteinspect_IMG_20180503_0001.pdf