

Petitions against controversial Yettinahole project dismissed by NGT

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The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Friday allowed the construction of the controversial Yettinahole project, which proposes the diversion of water from Yettinahole, a tributary, to be transported to Tumakuru, Hassan, Chikkaballapura, Kolar, and Bengaluru Rural districts of Karnataka.

In its judgement, the panel headed by Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel noted that since the project is for drinking water purposes, it does not require environmental clearance.

"Since the project is for drinking water purposes, no environmental clearance is required...However, the Forest Department and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF & CC) to monitor the project and if they found that there were any violation, they are at liberty to take appropriate action", the judgement noted.

The Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Limited (KNNL), the government body in-charge of implementing the project, had earlier denied that an environmental clearance was needed for the project since it is for drinking water purposes. However, around 40% of the water diverted will be used to fill minor tanks, from which water is used for other purposes.

The NGT also dismissed all the petitions seeking to stop the construction of the Yettinahole project.

The project aims to divert the west-flowing Yettinahole, a major tributary of the Nethravathi river, towards Bengaluru to meet the drinking water needs of Kolar, Chikkaballapura, Tumakuru and Bengaluru Rural districts. The estimated Rs. 13,000 crore project will divert nearly 24 TMC (or 672 billion litres) of water through canals and pipelines spanning 1000 kilometres.

However, in their petitions to the NGT, activists and environmentalists opposing the construction of the project contended that the water from the project will be used for irrigation and not only for drinking water purposes.

Dinesh Holla, an activist from Mangaluru, said that the start of the construction of the project had contributed to water scarcity along the Yettinahole and in Dakshina Kannada district.

"The construction of the Yettinahole project has led to drying up of water sources in the Nethravathi river. This is in spite of declaring Dakshina Kannada district as drought-hit last year. There is drinking water scarcity and the government has admitted this region is drought hit and yet the project is going ahead. All political parties have willingly agreed to this project." Dinesh said.

Furthermore, a 2016 report by the Indian Institute of Science prepared by a team of researchers led by TV Ramachandra had questioned the amount of water in catchment areas of the Yettinahole that would be available for diversion. It had contended that only 9.5 TMC of water will be available even in monsoon months, which is far less than the 24 TMC estimated by the government.

