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NAMMA BENGALURU

Wetlands on path to destruction

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With nearly 3.75 acres of the under-construction SEZ falling within the lake and the surrounding wetland, a report by IISc. scientists says that construction, excavation and dumping of debris is affecting the wetland. — PHOTOS: Sudhakara Jai





Construction of SEZ continues to affect city's largest wetland that connects Bellandur, Agara, Varthur lakes.

The hope for protecting the city's largest wetland – connecting Bellandur, Agara and Varthur lakes – that arose after censure from the National Green Tribunal (NGT) over construction of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) there – surely must be fading.

The latest report by the ENVIS Technical Committee – prepared by scientists of the Energy and Wetlands Research Group of the Indian Institute of Science – notes continuing degradation of the more than 400-hectare wetland, which includes the severely polluted Bellandur and Varthur lakes.

The report notes that since 2013 – when the last technical report was brought out – the storm water canal has narrowed by 1 metre (to 15 metres) at its narrowest point. Apart from this, nearly 74 acres of the SEZ has now been fully walled off while construction – which has not been stayed by the NGT's May 7 order – is in full swing.

With nearly 3.75 acres falling in the lake and the surrounding wetland, the report says that construction, excavation and dumping of debris is affecting the wetland.

“This fragile ecosystem needs to be conserved and brought back to its original form,” says T.V. Ramachandra, researcher at the Wetlands Research Group.

An NGT-appointed expert committee was supposed to prepare a report on wetlands and lakes in the city. However, with the three-month time frame being a constraint, members said that they have studied only the Bellandur wetland so far.

The need to protect wetlands – which acts like a filtration system for lakes, a system successfully followed in Jakkur Lake – is unfortunately yet to percolate in the system, says Mr. Ramachandra. In past studies, the group noted that the prevailing laws – all of which are Central legislation – are “ineffective” and have a “fragmented approach”, as they indirectly touch the subject of wetland protection.

C. Shivanna, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Lake Development Authority (LDA) said wetlands had not been defined as an entity separate from lakes. “We don't see much of a difference. All lakes should have a wetland, but the definitions revolve around the lake...In many cases, wetlands are in private areas and cannot be conserved,” he said.

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