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Saturday 10 December 2016
News updated at 4:04 PM IST

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New Delhi, Oct 25, 2016, PTI



An afforestation campaigner today moved the National Green Tribunal challenging the forest clearance granted by Karnataka government for construction of Phase-I of the Rs 12,912 crore Yettinahole project, prompting the green panel to seek response from the Centre and others.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar issued notices to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Karnataka government, Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Limited (KNNL), Regional Office of Environment Ministry and tree conservation officer.

The matter is scheduled for next hearing on November 7.

The NGT was hearing a plea filed by Bangalore-resident K N Somashekar challenging grant of forest clearance for construction of Phase-I of the Yettinahole project without "duly considering" its location, which falls in the ecologically sensitive zone of the Western Ghats.

The plea, filed through advocate Rahul Choudhary, claimed that the site of the project has also been identified as an ecologically sensitive zone by MoEF after taking into account two reports on the Western Ghats by Prof Madhav Gadgil and Dr K Kasturirangan.

It has referred to a report of Indian Institute of Sciences which has said that the project was based on "flawed hydrological studies and incorrect parameters" since gauge data from Bantwal across the river Netravathi have been used, which were about 60-70 kms from the actual project site.

"The report also points towards the possibility of severe water scarcity in Hassan and downstream districts due to large scale water diversion besides considerable losses in livelihood of local people," the plea said.

Somashekar, who has also challenged the Yettinahole project in NGT's southern bench, has contended that large scale diversion of water from the Netravathi river, running through an ecologically sensitive zone, will permanently deprive the entire area of a healthy water basin.

"The Regional Empowered Committee (REC) scrutinising the said project did not apply its mind while at it. The minutes of the 7th and 8th REC meetings show that the committee paid no heed to a dissent note issued by one of its own members, Dr A N Yellappa Reddy, specifying the dire consequences the said project could potentially have.

"The REC also did not take into account objections against the said diversions made by the appellant among many other people. Further violations by the proponent have also been recorded in a letter dated March 29, 2014 issued by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka," it said.