

## State yet to comply with NGT order to declare lakes as wetlands

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*On May 4, the tribunal had set an eight-week deadline, but the government has sought more time.*

Despite a strict deadline given by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to extend protection to the lakes in the city by declaring them as “wetlands,” the State government is seemingly sitting on the order.

Based on the NGT order, the Karnataka Lake Development and Conservation Authority (KLCDA) had surveyed 34 lakes and recommended their inclusion as wetlands under the Wetland Rules, 2010.

The list of lakes selected includes nine under the Forest Department and Lake Development Authority, apart from “prominent” lakes such as Bellandur, Ulsoor, Sankey tank, Yelahanka lake.

On May 4, NGT — which was hearing a case against two major builders whose projects are under-construction in the wetlands between Bellandur and Agara — had given the State government eight weeks time to identify lakes, get approval from the Ministry of Environment and Forests and notify it.

The hesitancy to declare these as wetlands is due to the fear of additional restrictions imposed on any identified area under the Wetlands Rules, 2010, said sources. Declaration of these as wetlands not just protects them for posterity, but it also places emphasis on the State government to preserve them in a time-bound manner.

The rules say entry of sewage and solid waste into wetlands must be stopped and all encroachments removed within six months.

### ‘Vital for city’s future’

T.V. Ramachandra from the Energy and Wetlands Research Group at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc.) said the preservation of wetlands are vital for the city’s future— whether its role in protection against floods, or providing space for purification and recharge of groundwater.

“The government should prioritise the notification of all 193 identified lakes as wetlands, and not just 34 ...the city has also paid a price for its ‘development’,” he said.

Leo Saldanha from the Environment Support Group (ESG) said the lack of effective response and protection had resulted in the decline of biodiversity as well as rise in public health problems.

“It isn’t just enough to declare them as wetlands. The 2010 rules and the proposed 2016 draft of wetland rules do not effectively provide protection to lakes. There needs to be stronger laws to ensure their protection,” he added.

Ramachandra, Secretary to Government (Environment and Ecology), said the government has sought six more months from National Green Tribunal.

“We need to verify if lakes in the city meet the criteria set in the Wetland Rules. This process takes time,” he said.

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