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## Divergent views on the project emerge at meet

Hongadahalla, Hassan district, Sept 16, DH News Service:

**'If Hassan can generate 200 MW of power using windmills, why cannot the Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL) look for alternative steps to produce 400 MW of power, instead of destroying the precious Western Ghats region,' questioned Mohan, the honorary wildlife warden of Hassan district.**

Deposing his views before the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel Chairman Prof Madhav Gadgil and other members, at a public meet organised by Malenadu Janapara Horata Samithi at Hongadahalla on Thursday, he requested the KPCL not to take the project as a prestige issue. He also requested the panel to take steps to stop mini hydel projects, as nearly 40 mini hydel projects are coming up in the Western Ghats region alone.

Samiti President H A Kishore Kumar, in his submission to the panel, stated that the project is against the Supreme Court guidelines which states that no mega project should come up in 10 km vicinity of wildlife sanctuary.

"The Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary is hardly 9.5 km from Bettakumeri, where the dam is proposed," he said.

Alleging that Bisle and Pushpagiri ranges will be damaged if the project comes up, he said that Kumaradhara, the major river, will dry. He also alleged that the KPCL is hiding many facts regarding the transmission line, tunnel, roads and township among many other issues.

KPCL Executive Engineer Radhakrishna who was present at the public meet said that he was not aware of the visit of Expert Panel and public meet.

"I came to the spot only after reading newspaper reports," he said and clarified that the KPCL is not against environment. "We need about 7,000 to 8,000 MW of additional power," he said and added that the KPCL requires only 480 acres of land for the Gundia project which is 'very economical in our opinion'.

However, quickly reacting to Radhakrishna's remarks, Expert Panel Chairman Prof Madhav Gadgil said that the panel had informed the State Principal Secretary on August 25 itself. "If the principal secretary has not informed the persons concerned, how we are responsible," he said and apologised for any misunderstanding.

### Villagers supporting the project

A few villagers said that they want the project to come up in the proposed site. Gundia Jala Vidyut Para Horata Samiti President H S Kushalappa said they stopped cultivating their land as the survey work for the project has been going on for the last 20 years. The villagers are facing several problems that include diseases to cardamom crop, wild elephant menace and lack of other basic civic amenities. "We are ready to hand over our land if we get suitable compensation," he said.

Hongadahalla Gram Panchayat member Radhakrishna too said that about 90 per cent of the villagers are ready to part with their land. "Those who are opposing the project are not from the village and most of the villagers are not opposing the project."

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