

[Back](#)

[Karnataka](#) - [Shimoga](#)

Environmental report on Gundia hydel project kicks up a row

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IN THE CENTRE OF CONTROVERSY: Quiet flows the Gundia in Shikaripur taluk of Hassan district notwithstanding the controversy over a proposed hydel project.

SHIMOGA: The proposed Gundia Hydel Project with an installed capacity of 400 MW to be built by Karnataka Power Corporation (KPC) Ltd. across the Gundia river, a tributary of the Netravati, in the Arsikere taluk of the Hassan district, has kicked up a controversy with environmentalists in the Western Ghats region opposing it strongly.

The environmental activists said the Environment Impact Assessment Report prepared by the Institute For Catchment Studies and Environmental Management (ICSEM), a Bangalore-based independent agency engaged by the KPC, had failed to address the disastrous impact that the proposed project would cause to the flora and fauna in the Western Ghat belt.

The institute submitted the report to the KPC in October last year. The KPC will hold the public hearing meeting soon to hear objections from the public to the proposed project. But the findings of the report had become controversial even before the meeting is convened.

The Vriksha Laksha Andolana (VLA), an environmental organisation in the Western Ghat region, termed the environment impact assessment report as "tailor made" as it was prepared only to support the hydel project without looking into serious environment and forest related issues.

Andolana's convenor Ananth Hegde Ashishar said the reports prepared by the institute gave room for suspicion that serious issues had been overlooked. When the institute submitted a similar report on the proposed hydel project near the Jog Falls in 2001 it caused strong resentment from the environments. After the andolan pointed out the mistakes and

inconsistencies in the report prepared by the Earnest and Young Company for the power project near Dandeli, the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board rejected the report and subsequently the project was cancelled.

Mr. Hegde said the KPC should give up the proposed hydel project across the Gundia taking into consideration serious environmental impact in the Western Ghats belt.

Taking exception to the remark in the report that there were no flora and fauna which were rare and on the verge of extinction and that what existed in this area were commonly found elsewhere, he said the report was far from truth because there were several rare species in and around the proposed project area which would be destroyed if the project was allowed to be implemented.

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