

## KOLLERU

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Kolleru in Andhra Pradesh is one of the largest and most ancient fresh water lakes in Asia. A great wetland & a magnificent bird habitat (1000 Sq.Km) it found mention in Hieuntsang's travelogue when he passed through this part of Andhra in the Seventh C.A.D. A politician - bureaucrat – corporate nexus ravaged the lake for 25 years, I filed a PIL in 1998 in the A.P. High Court and the judgement delivered in 2001 directed the Government to remove all fish ponds in the Sanctuary area. It is a Ramsar site. In 2005 Shri Pranay Waghray approached the supreme court for implementation of my judgement. In 2006 all encroachments, i.e fish ponds have been removed. Significantly one of the directives was to collect punitive damages from the encroachers & pay to the Kolleru fishermen as compensation. But fresh fishponds have come up again this year. Last summer the AP State assembly passed a resolution recommending delimitation of the sanctuary from contour +5 to +3. Some of us have vehemently protested and on 11-9-09 the government decided to shelve the idea. As per the supreme court's judgement the AP Government, hired wetland International for restoration of the lake. Actually the lake is afflicted with a number of problems.

- 1) The whole lake is a Ramsar Site and not just the notified sanctuary. Hence the whole lake should be protected and not a part thereof. The government seems disinclined to accept it.
- 2) The court permitted traditional fishing and agriculture in the sanctuary. The private land owners refuse to do either & want compensation for their lands to leave the sanctuary.
- 3) The lake's fishermen who actually facilitated encroachments demand compensation. The Government offers periodic monetary palliatives, but has no clue for a permanent solution. We suggested AMUL model of dairying which is eco-conducive & women oriented. But the government is yet to respond.
- 4) A 2006 judgement of the supreme court directed all state governments to notify a 10 KM buffer from the notified sanctuaries basing on merit. The government has failed to inform the public. I recently impleaded before the supreme court, in a PIL concerning pulicot lake, since it applies to Kolleru as well.
- 5) The wetland international prepared a good management plan for the restroration of the lake. The government pleads paucity of funds to ground the project.
- 6) Kolleru is a political cesspool. Strangely even pulicot lake, a flamingo habitat in A.P. is not a Ramsar site. Pulicot like Kolleru has now become political hot water thanks to the SEZ.