

MINUTES OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE NATIONAL TIGER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY HELD UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THIRU S. REGUPATHY, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FORESTS AND WILDLIFE, ON 12.11.2007 IN ROOM NO. 403, PARYAVARAN BHAVAN, NEW DELHI

The second meeting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was held under the Chairmanship of the Minister of State (Forests and Wildlife), who is also the Vice-Chairperson of the said Authority, on 12th November, 2007.

At the outset, the Member Secretary (MS), NTCA welcomed the participants, while highlighting the amendments made to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in 2006 for reinforcing tiger conservation, apart from emphasizing the need for a holistic approach vis-à-vis the tiger dynamics. This was followed by introductory remarks from the DGF & SS, who mentioned the important initiatives taken by the Ministry of Environment & Forests towards strengthening tiger conservation. Further the outcome of the all India tiger estimation relating to four States and the need to conserve tiger outside the tiger reserves and protected areas was also emphasized by him.

The Chairman, Shri S. Regupathy, Hon'ble Minister of State for Forests and Wildlife welcomed the Members and stated that tiger conservation is a challenging task in the present context, since our tiger reserves and protected areas are faced with several ecological and local problems. Habitat fragmentation, conflicting land uses, presence of heavily used infrastructure and biotic interference are adversely affecting the tiger habitat. Further, while stating the initiatives taken by Project Tiger (now the NTCA) for refining the all India tiger estimation, he informed that the estimation figures pertaining to four States indicated that the tiger population in tiger reserves and protected areas has changed marginally. However, in forest areas outside tiger reserves/Protected Areas, it has sharply declined, due to degradation of habitat in terms of prey bio-mass and various other limiting factors. The protection status in tiger reserves and other areas is not up to the desired level, on account of frontline staff vacancies and ageing of staff, due to the policy of non-recruitment in several

States. The Chairman informed the Members that the State Chief Ministers have been addressed in this regard for the needful by the Prime Minister. He also highlighted the urgent measures taken by the Ministry for strengthening protection, and stated that 100% Central assistance has been provided to 17 tiger States, in addition to the Annual Plan allocation, for creation of "tiger protection force" comprising of ex-army personnel and native workforce, complementing the efforts of field staff and existing protection initiatives. Process has been initiated for enhancing the village relocation package for creation of inviolate areas in tiger reserves, and criteria have been finalized for determining such spaces. The Chairman emphasized the need to realign as well as reinforce the strategy for conservation both in the "core" as well as "buffer" areas. He also informed that the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau has been operationalized from 6th June, 2007, and the Government has approved creation of as many as 59 new posts apart from the post of Additional Director in the rank of Inspector General of Police.

Thereafter, the agenda items were taken up for discussion, and details of deliberations are as below:

Agenda Item No. 1

Confirmation of minutes of the last meeting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) vis-à-vis comments received

Shri V.P. Singh, Hon'ble MP and Member, NTCA stated that the minutes of the last meeting should be circulated to the Members who have joined subsequently. The Secretary (E&F) directed the MS (NTCA) for the needful. Further, Shri V.P. Singh while highlighting the success of Project Tiger wanted to know the reasons for tiger decline and the efforts done by the NTCA since its creation. The MS (NTCA) apprised the Authority Members of the various milestone initiatives taken by the Ministry as well as the NTCA towards strengthening tiger conservation. The Chairman pointed out that the Hon'ble Prime Minister has addressed all Chief Ministers of concerned States for filling up the vacant posts of frontline staff in tiger reserves and protected areas. Prof. Gopal K. Kadekodi raised the issue relating to the slow

progress of village relocation and the need for consultation with Panchayat. He also desired to know the action taken by the NTCA towards implementation of various decisions taken so far. The MS (NTCA) informed about the factual position and stated that such issues would be addressed in the subsequent agenda items listed for discussion. The Secretary (E&F) desired that the agenda items should be taken up as listed and discussion on other related issues may follow later.

The minutes of the first meeting of the NTCA were confirmed.

Agenda Item No. 2

Proposed amendments to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972

The MS (NTCA) apprised the Members of the proposed amendments to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Shri V.P. Singh wanted to know the timeframe for recruitment of NTCA staff. The MS (NTCA) informed that recruitment rules have been notified and the process for creation of posts has been expedited. The Chief Wildlife Warden, Tamil Nadu expressed the view that frequent amendments to the Act are not desirable and there should be more consultation process. Dr. Sanjay Singh, JS & Legislative Counsel, Ministry of Law & Justice and Member (NTCA) informed that amendments are based on the prevailing exigencies, and involved a consultation process.

The Authority took note of the proposed amendments to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Agenda Item No. 3

Apprising the Authority regarding measures taken by the Ministry of Environment and Forests to make the National Tiger Conservation Authority functional for day to day working

The MS (NTCA) gave an update on the measures taken by the MoEF for making the NTCA functional. Shri V.P. Singh wanted to know

whether the NTCA Members were consulted before they were included in the Administrative and Technical Committees of NTCA. The MS (NTCA) informed that informal consultations were made with such Members. Prof. Gopal K. Kadekodi desired that all such decisions should be taken by the NTCA. The DGF & SS informed that the Ministry has created the Committees under reference, on the lines of the Central Zoo Authority, for the smooth functioning of the NTCA. The Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs opined that the Administrative Committee may give its recommendations to the NTCA. Ms. Archana Prasad desired that the Technical Committee should consider human issues as well. The Director, Wildlife Institute of India stated that based on his experience in statutory bodies, he felt that the Committees should have adequate power to ensure the day to day functioning of the Authority. Shri H.S. Panwar desired that the budget issues should be placed before the NTCA for consideration. Shri V.P. Singh desired that the minutes and decisions of Administrative Committee should be circulated to all NTCA Members.

The suggestions of the Members were noted.

Agenda Item No. 4

Update on All India tiger estimation using the new method

The MS (NTCA) gave a broad outline of the ongoing all India tiger estimation using the refined methodology as approved by the Tiger Task Force. He stated that the process was initiated in the Project Tiger Directorate in 2002 which was later made into a collaborative effort with the Wildlife Institute of India. He also pointed out that the estimation results relating to Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh indicate that the status of tiger population in areas outside the tiger reserve / protected area is precarious. However, the status of source populations of tiger in tiger reserves falling in the States under reference has not changed much. Thereafter Dr. Y.V. Jhala, Reader, Wildlife Institute of India made a powerpoint presentation, providing an update on the all India tiger estimation process. Shri V.P. Singh appreciated the effort. The Chief Wildlife Warden, Rajasthan wanted to know the status of tiger population in

isolated reserves like Sariska, and the process for upgrading the habitat in such isolated field units, apart from the strategy for actively managing isolated tiger populations. Dr. Y.V. Jhala stated that Panna and Ranthambhore Tiger Reserves are isolated and may be comparable to the Sariska situation. Shri H.S. Panwar pointed out the need for restoring the degraded areas, and fostering an agenda of co-existence around inviolate, natal areas. He further emphasized that by improving the soil productivity, the habitat revival can be achieved, which should be complemented with inter-departmental coordination. He stated that the situation in Sariska should be improved. Shri V.P. Singh desired that the problem should be identified and assistance should be provided for addressing them. Shri H.S. Panwar stated that during the launching of Project Tiger the core and buffer strategy was adopted keeping in mind the need for providing habitat supplement to wild animals from core areas, apart from eliciting public support. He also highlighted the report of a Task Force constituted by the Indian Board for Wildlife in this regard.

Agenda Item No. 5

Protection & management strategy for in-situ tiger conservation in the wake of tiger population decline outside source areas

The MS (NTCA) apprised the Members of the in-situ tiger conservation strategy for strengthening the "source" populations of tiger and managing the "source-sink" dynamics by restoring habitat connectivity. The Chief Wildlife Warden, Rajasthan expressed concern that tiger cubs are spilling out of Ranthambhore and they should be relocated, since development of buffer is a slow process. The MS (NTCA) informed that the situation calls for an "active in-situ management" as well for restoring the buffer, and detailed guidelines have been issued to States in this regard. Shri H.S. Panwar, Expert Member, NTCA, stated that while Sariska has the potential to harbour some tigers, the present situation should be assessed. He also observed that the strategy for in-situ tiger conservation should be seen in the light of attributes of tiger ecology. While recalling the status of Project Tiger during the formative years, he emphasized that in the present context

tiger conservation requires a strategy to save “inviolate critical breeding habitats”, supported by larger dispersal habitats. Shri V.P. Singh suggested that a sub-committee can visit the area and suggest measures. The MS (NTCA) stated that several activities are happening in the buffer zone of Kanha Tiger Reserve, in tune with the recommendations of the Task Force of Indian Board for Wild Life act in 1982, which need to be emulated by others.

The suggestions made by Members were noted. The Authority took note of the in-situ tiger conservation strategy.

Agenda Item No. 6

Update on implementation of Tiger Task Force recommendations

The MS (NTCA) gave an update on the implementation of the Tiger Task Force recommendations, which was noted by the Authority.

Agenda Item No. 7

Compliance issues vis-à-vis directives issued based on decisions taken in the first meeting of the NTCA

The MS (NTCA) gave an update on the compliance by States on the directives issued, and the Authority took note of the same.

Agenda No. 8

Tiger reintroduction proposals

The item was discussed and it was decided that the Technical Committee should examine the proposals vis-à-vis the field conditions and submit its report at the earliest.

Agenda Item No. 9

Hearing the suggestions of Shri Navin M. Raheja for tiger conservation, as directed by the Hon'ble Apex Court in WP No. 47 of 1998

Shri Navin M. Raheja presented his suggestions, and it was decided that the same should be considered vis-à-vis the response affidavit filed by the MoEF in the ongoing PIL.

Agenda Item No. 10

Periodicity of NTCA meetings

The item was discussed at length and it was decided that the Authority should meet at least once in six months every year.

Agenda Item No.11

Update on the progress made by the Committees constituted by the NTCA

Both the Chairman of the Committees constituted by the NTCA gave an update regarding the progress made by their respective Committees. Prof. Madhav Gadgil, Expert Member, NTCA and the Chairman of the Committee constituted for suggesting refinement of the monitoring process relating to Tiger Reserves and its dissemination, stated that the draft report of the Committee has been circulated, and the final report would be presented within the allocated timeframe.

Prof. Gopal K. Kadekodi, Expert Member, NTCA and Chairman of the Committee Constituted for suggesting reserve specific strategy in Tiger Reserves affected by extremist engineered disturbances, while providing an update on the progress made by his Committee, desired discussion with the Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Law and Justice. Secretary (E&F) suggested that the Committee may have a separate meeting in this regard. Prof. S. Sukumar, Expert Member, NTCA suggested that consultation with Police Department may also be done during the meeting. Shri V.P. Singh suggested that free ration should be provided to field staff working in Tiger Reserves, and night patrolling should be intensified during the full moon period. Secretary (E&F) desired that the Wildlife Crime

Control Bureau should note such aspects for intensifying patrolling. Shri V.P. Singh stated that poaching details relating to every tiger should be obtained. The MS(NTCA) informed that State level mortality figures are collated, pertaining to major species of wild animals.

Agenda Item No. 12

Tiger poaching status and arrangement made for developing a data base with information gathering

The MS (NTCA) gave an update on the tiger poaching status, and the efforts taken for strengthening protection by providing 100% Central Assistance to States for deployment of Tiger Protection Force. He also informed that the States have been requested to send proposals for strengthening the office of the Chief Wildlife Warden to collate wildlife crime data, apart from networking.

The Authority took note of the same.

Agenda Item No. 13

Update on the Decision taken during the recent meeting of CITES (COP-14)

The MS (NTCA) informed the Members that during the 14th meeting of the Conference of Parties to CITES, India introduced a resolution along with China, Nepal and Russian Federation, which was adopted as a decision. The said decision, inter alia, has directions to Parties with operations breeding tigers on a commercial scale, for restricting such captive populations to a level supportive only to conserving wild tigers. Further, he informed that India made an intervention appealing to China to phase out tiger farming and eliminating stockpiles of Asian big cats body parts and derivatives, while emphasizing the importance of continuing the ban on trade of body parts of tigers.

The Authority may like to take note of the same.

Agenda Item No. 14

Agenda items proposed by NTCA Expert Members

The MS (NTCA) highlighted the agenda items proposed by the two non-official expert members of the NTCA, while explaining the present status with respect to each. This was followed by a general discussion on issues relating to the agenda items. Both Prof. Gopal K. Kadekodi and Prof. Archana Prasad desired to know the policy on relocation/rehabilitation of villages from Tiger Reserves. The MS (NTCA) apprised the members regarding action taken for enhancing the village relocation package, and the proposal made for district level and State level committees to ensure effective implementation. It was also decided that the proposal received from the Zakir Hussain College, University of Delhi for carrying out socio-economic study around Corbett Tiger Reserve should be referred to the Technical Committee. Shri H.S. Panwar, Expert Member, NTCA emphasized the need for strengthening the office of the Member Secretary (NTCA).

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.
