

Special Theme Section: The Dhamra Port debate – perspectives and lessons

The Dhamra Port development in Orissa, India, has been characterised by conflict. The tension exists not only between developers and environmental groups, but also among local and international environmental organisations and individual experts around differing approaches, processes, and uses of information. For more than a year, the issues surrounding the Dhamra Port development have sparked passionate and sometimes vehement discussion on email listservs and during the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) meeting at the International Sea Turtle Society's annual symposium (January 2008, Loreto, Baja California, Mexico). Because of the concern among interested parties, and the importance of the issues as related to sea turtle conservation, the editors of the Marine Turtle Newsletter (MTN) and the Indian Ocean Turtle Newsletter (IOTN) are simultaneously publishing a variety of editorials and perspectives on this subject. This ensures that the discussion and arguments are documented in a published forum, and can reach a wider audience. Editors Matthew Godfrey (MTN) and Chloe Schauble (IOTN) sought contributions from an array of informed persons from all sides of the Dhamra debate. Kartik Shanker, Chloe's fellow IOTN Co-Editor, recused himself from an editorial role in relation to Dhamra-related contributions because he has been a player in the debate and wished to contribute a perspective piece himself.

The following people were invited to contribute: Nicolas Pilcher (MTSG Co-Chair), Holly Dublin (Chair, SSC-IUCN), Sanjay Choudhry (Corporate Communications, TATA Steel), Amlan Dutta (Dhamra Port Company Ltd), Janaki Lenin & Romulus Whitaker (conservationists in India), Ashish Fernandes & Sanjiv Gopal (Greenpeace India), the Orissa

Marine Resources Conservation Consortium, Aarthi Sridhar (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment), Biswajit Mohanty & Belinda Wright (conservationists in India), Jack Frazier (Smithsonian Institution), Nicholas Mrosovsky (University of Toronto and former MTSG Co-Chair), and Kartik Shanker (Indian Institute of Science). We asked authors to keep each contribution under 1000 words of text; some were more diligent than others in meeting this request. We also asked Douglas Hykle (IOSEA) if we could reprint his editorial published earlier in 2008 on the IOSEA website. Hykle's editorial provides a good overview of a number of the issues, and it is followed by two letters: one that was jointly authored by a number of sea turtle conservationists/NGOs in India and sent to the IUCN, and the other that was written by the IUCN in response to the first letter. Other perspectives on the situation are provided by Mrosovsky and Shanker. Following this are three editorials written by sea turtle conservationists in India who have actively expressed concern about the Dhamra Port development: Lenin & Whitaker, Fernandes, and Rodriguez & Sridhar. Next are three editorials written by members of the MTSG, the IUCN/SSC and the Dhamra Port Company Ltd, on their positions: Pilcher, Dublin and Dutta. The theme section is brought to a close with an editorial by Frazier who tries to situate the Dhamra debate in a wider context. While we hope that this forum will shed some light on the larger issues surrounding the Dhamra Port development debate, we realise that simply highlighting the debate is only one step in the complex process of resolving conservation issues. Nevertheless, understanding the problems is a necessary first step towards finding solutions. We thank all authors for their time and effort in producing their editorials for this special theme section.