

with a port development that had been approved, was going ahead, and our role was seen as being one of using knowledge and influence to ensure it did the least possible damage to the turtles and their environment.

The Dhamra port situation is one where IUCN's proactive engagement, through its Business and Biodiversity Programme, Asia Regional Programme, the SSC and the MTSG, is aimed at making things better than what they might otherwise have been. We are demonstrably influencing the Dhamra Port Company Ltd to deliver on its conservation promises, through good science, the use of cutting edge technologies and for the betterment of livelihoods of people in the State of Orissa.

Environmental mitigation and the protection of marine turtles are fundamental to the outcomes achieved.

Perhaps the biggest criticism of IUCN's involvement that has been brought to my attention is that we may have fallen short of bringing all concerned parties and individuals along with us in this role. I have been assured that those involved have certainly tried their best to consult, but if some feel they have been left out there is always room for more consultation. Through continued exchange of ideas, and through exploiting opportunities for collective thinking and actions, even greater conservation benefits can be obtained in future.

Dhamra Port: the other perspective*

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The Dhamra port has been a contentious issue for quite a many years, with a history of mistrust, misconception and hysteria. Perceived to be one of the largest ports in India when complete and one of the few projects actually being implemented in Orissa, without being held up by social upheavals, legal or political encumbrances, this port is actually owned by the state government of Orissa, India, a perception not realized by many dissenters.

The Dhamra Port Company Ltd. is a Special Purpose Vehicle assigned to build own operate and transfer (BOOST) the port to the Orissa government, the ultimate owner. Regardless of the fact that the EIA of the port project has undergone scrutiny by the National Environment Appellate Authority (NEAA), the only judicial body specifically mandated to look into environment clearances, wherein the NEAA has upheld the environment clearance, the port faces constant and directed criticism at various quarters. Its association with IUCN is looked at with derision and cynicism, once again regardless of the fact that this is the first such association of conservation science and Indian industry. Efforts are constantly being made to dissuade IUCN and a particular business house which is one of the promoters, from its

association with DPCL. Some of the criticism has been very personalized against the Chair of this house. Perhaps because of the traditional cynicism of the corporate sector by conservation scientists and conservation workers in India, research and industry have never mingled together due to a history of mistrust.

Conservation research application in managing the protected areas of India has seen few success stories, the best example being the current tiger population in the 29 tiger reserves of the country. Conservation efforts for the olive ridley in Orissa have never been able to stem the 9,000 – 10,000 recorded turtle deaths every year due to trawl fishing, even with judicial interventions, as the conservation approach was fundamentally faulty, possibly because enforcement and conservation need a fine balanced approach, which was never there resulting in the alienation of the trawl fishermen, and a stake for turtle conservation was never felt by the trawl fishermen. Within this background, we have a port being built near turtle habitat; we need to ask ourselves can the port help in turtle conservation in a coordinated effort. Can conservation efforts be directed towards involving all stakeholders in consolidation to bring results?

We need to ask ourselves whether and how ports harm turtles, are there other ports which are close to turtle habitats. The fact is ports don't harm turtles with numerous ports in proximity to turtle habitat and nesting grounds; the numerous examples are the ports of Brisbane, Angola, the 90 riverine ports of US and especially the Canaveral Harbor in Florida near Cape Canaveral a situation strikingly similar to Wheeler Island and Dhamra port. What are the measures taken by them? Who takes these measures? Do these measures minimize intake of sea bed life? Yes they do, and in the US, the US Army Corps of Engineers and National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration have been doing pioneering work on dredging with safeguards for the last 27 years. Are these measures being followed by the Dhamra port? Yes, they are. But, the EIA process had flaws? Why, because it was not obtained from the Ministry of Environment and Forests. This issue has been examined in great lengths by the NEAA, who have upheld the procedure and the clearance for such a case. In fact, the procedure of environment clearance warranted that the EIA be cleared by an Empowered Committee for Environment Clearance (ECEC) of the Ministry of Surface Transport (MOST) and had the port applied to the MOEF, it would have naturally directed the EIA clearance application to ECEC of MOST, which had members from the MOEF too. But that's not the right way; the traditional way would have been the MOEF clearing the project. But if MOEF delegates the power to MOST, should not the extant procedures for the environment clearance be followed? There are concerns regarding the EIA application submission of 1997 having fundamental flaws like baseline studies, port location etc. But wasn't the original EIA submission supplemented by additional study reports, as some of the very same questions were asked by the ECEC during the two years of scrutiny undertaken, and further the NEAA had also examined the environment clearance on these very concerns. But the explanations are never satisfactory and the debate goes on.

Literature cited

Bustard, H.R. 1974. *India—A preliminary survey of the prospects of crocodile farming*. FAO Report IND/71/033, FAO, Rome. 66pp.

So where do we stand now? Where do we direct our collective energies? Criticize and condemn this unique and pioneering association between industry and science for working together towards conservation in India. What would be in the best interests of conservation science in India, letting DPCL build the port without scientific guidance as has been the traditional approach of conservationists in India? Why can't we apply conservation science in the field and especially at the Dhamra port, when we know such research exists and proves that ports and turtles can co-exist. Would conservation be better off without the port having the scientific expertise of the IUCN, is the question we need to ask ourselves.

Since the discovery of the arribadas on the Orissa coast (Bustard 1974, Bustard 1976) turtle conservation efforts by various NGOs, research institutions and the state government have resulted in satellite telemetry studies, capture-recapture studies, and nesting site studies, which helped us understand olive ridley ecology and habitat usage, which has helped protect turtle habitats. However, these conservation efforts could not prevent the alienation of the trawl fishermen, as we haven't been able to convince them in using the Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), because we have embittered them by laws and fishing bans, more so with no workable alternate livelihoods on the ground for them during the fishing ban. However, now the port and its promoters have an opportunity to help in changing the perceptions of the trawl fishing community and work towards conservation. But this can only be done in a collaborative effort together with conservationists and conservation scientists, and only when conservation science and industry can come together for conservation.

Relevant weblink:

http://cms.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/office/s/asia/asia_where_work/india_programme_office/dhamra_port/index.cfm

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