

Students' Sea-turtle Conservation Network (SSTCN)

A-14, Ragamalika Apartments, Adyar, Chennai – 600 020, India

To,

1. Mr. C.K.Sreedharan IFS
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
2. Chief Wildlife Warden,
Tamil Nadu Forest Department
Panagal Building
No.1 Jeenis Road
Saidapet
Chennai - 600 015

June 4, 2008

Dear Sirs,

Sub: Removal of ETRP *Casuarina* plantations from sea turtle nesting habitats on the Tamil Nadu coast.

The problem of Forest Department *Casuarina* plantations encroaching on to turtle nesting habitat was brought to the notice of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Tamil Nadu, vide our letter dated December 7, 2007.

In response to this letter, the Chief Wildlife Warden initiated an inspection, which was carried out by Dr. Neelakantan, Chief Conservator of Forests and Mr Sugirtharaj DFO, Kancheepuram, in my presence, on 17.12.2007. We visited some plantation sites in Nemelli, where *Casuarina* saplings have been planted right up to the high tide line, leaving no suitable nesting habitat for turtles.

The Chief Wildlife Warden and the Chief Conservator of Forests agreed that a minimum of 50 m from the high tide line should have been left free for turtles to nest, for other shore life to flourish and also to allow for the natural process of sand supply to the littoral current to prevent erosion of the shore. Since this was not the case in Nemelli and many areas, assurances were given to take corrective action.

Since these plantations were funded by the World Bank under the Emergency Tsunami Reconstruction Programme, we also wrote to the President of the World Bank, appraising him of the problem and requesting the bank's assistance to the TNFD in undoing the ecological damage done to the coastline. We suggested that plantations within 50 metres from the high tide line should be uprooted so that turtle nesting habitat could be restored.

As you are aware, Mr Christoph Pusch, Task Team Leader, Tsunami Emergency Reconstruction Project, and his colleague, Ms. Ranu Sinha, visited Chennai and met us on February 7th 2008. Subsequently, after their meeting with you on the 8th of February, we received a report from them on their visit to Chennai. The report stated that the Tree Foundation had been asked by your office to prepare an assessment, based on which the Tamil Nadu Forest Department would carry out any corrective measures suggested by the NGO.

It is learnt that the TREE Foundation submitted a report to your office on the 18th of March, 2008, in which it has recommended that there should be no *Casuarina* plantations up to 45m from the high tide line, and any that have been planted in that zone should be removed.

Further to our earlier pleas, we once again request the TNFD to immediately remove *Casuarina* plantations - up to at least 45m from the high tide line. This is the only solution, and one that can be easily implemented. It is imperative that the removal happens as soon as possible in order to allow enough time for the beach topography to stabilise before the next nesting season begins in December.

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department has always been supportive of turtle conservation activities in the State and we sincerely hope that your department will do the right thing in this matter. Since the next turtle-nesting season is barely six months away conservation organizations, naturalists and concerned citizens are anxiously waiting for the Forest Department to take positive steps so that our ancient visitors, the endangered olive ridley sea turtles, can continue to nest on our shores as they have been doing for thousands of years.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Akila Balu
Coordinator
SSTCN

CC Mr Christoph Pusch
Task Team Leader
Tsunami Emergency Reconstruction Project
The World Bank
New Delhi