

Letter to MoEF about reconstituted Expert Appraisal Committee on River Valley Projects

A letter on above subject was sent on Sept 11, 2013, to Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, including the Minister Smt Jayanthi Natarajan, Secretary Dr V Rajagopalan, Joint Secretary Maninder Singh and Director B B Barman. The letter was endorsed by over 60 groups and individuals from 16 states. Some of the persons who endorsed this included Akhil Gogoi (KMSS, Assam), Shri Ramaswamy Iyer (former Secretary, Union Ministry of Water Resources), Prof M K Prasad (KSSP), Ravi Chopra (member, NGBRA), Madhu Bhaduri (former Ambassador), Ritwick Dutta (Lawyer), Latha Anantha (River Research Centre, Kerala), Subir Bhowmik (well known journalist). For the full list of endorsees, see: <http://sandrp.wordpress.com/2013/09/07/reconstituted-expert-appraisal-committee-on-river-valley-projects-moef-has-neither-environment-sense-nor-guts-unacceptable-committee/>

Text of the Letter is given below.

On Sept 5, 2013, Union Ministry of Environment and Forests came out with “Re-constitution of Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) for River Valley & Hydro Electric Project” (see: <http://envfor.nic.in/sites/default/files/EAC-Order-05092013.pdf>). Mr. Alok Perti, former Coal Secretary, has been made chairperson of the committee that appraises all major irrigation projects, dams, hydropower projects and river valley projects for Environment clearances at two stages (TOR and final). It is shocking to see that Mr. Perti, who has absolutely no environment credentials, who has been known to be anti environment, who has been accusing the environment ministry to be a road block for coal mining and who has shown his ignorance about environmental issues on several occasions, has been selected as the chair person, putting aside basic environmental sense. This reconstituted EAC on River Valley and Hydropower projects under Mr. Perti’s Chairpersonship is completely unacceptable.

It is equally disturbing to see that the committee has no woman representation, no sociologist, no one from non-government organisations. All ten members are either from the government, or from government organisations or government-funded academic organisations. This means that none of them would be in a position to take a stand which is independent of the government. The committee also has no river expert, no climate change-water expert, nor disaster management expert, all of whom are crucially important for a committee like this, which decides the fate of India’s rivers, even more so after the Uttarakhand disaster. P K Chaudhuri, one of the members of the new committee has done no work related to rivers, water or environment, going by his CV. Hardip S Kingra, who was involved in the organization of Commonwealth games and has been the chairman of National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation, has had no work experience related to rivers or environment.

Specifically, Mr Alok Perti, who has been a senior functionary, including secretary of currently controversial Coal Ministry from Oct 2009 to early 2013 and in ministries like defense and family welfare before Oct 2009, clearly has had no background on environment or rivers. As a coal secretary, he had accused MoEF for stalling the growth by not giving clearances to coal mining projects automatically. The Economic Times quoted Mr. Perti as

saying in a report¹: "India has to decide whether she wants electricity or tigers." Such simplistic statements reflect that he has absolutely no understanding of environment, biodiversity, leave aside rivers. Mr. Perti's anti civil society stance was also exposed when he refused to discuss issues with activists and asked them to go and file RTIs². By appointing such a person as chairman of the EAC on RVP, the MoEF has shown it has no interest in protecting the environment or forests which is supposed to be its mandate. This committee is clearly unacceptable and will also not stand legal scrutiny.

Under the circumstances, we demand that:

1. The notification (No. J-12011/EAC /2010-IA-I dated Sept 5, 2013) of reconstitution of the EAC be cancelled;
2. A participatory process be initiated for reconstitution of the EAC with the norms some of suggested in our letter to you dated June 29, 2013, see: <http://sandrp.wordpress.com/2013/06/29/lessons-from-uttarakhand-disaster-for-selection-of-river-valley-projects-expert-committee/>;
3. The EAC meeting slated for Sept 23-24, 2013 should be cancelled.

¹ http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2013-01-10/news/36258334_1_hasdeo-arand-coal-ministry-coal-blocks

² <http://environmentaljusticetv.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/greenpeace-india-protest-at-the-coal-ministry/>