



DAKSHINBANGA MATSYAJIBI FORUM (DMF)

Trade Union Regn. No.20474/92.

Affiliated to National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF)



Memo No – DMF/President-40/24

To

1) The Secretary,
Department of Fisheries,
Government of West Bengal,
Salt lake city, Kolkata -700091

2) The Director of Fisheries,
Government of West Bengal,
Salt Lake city, Kolkata -700091

Dated: 23/04/24



Sub: Recent Report on Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry

Sir/Madam,

We write to call your attention to the recently released reports in national and international media about the endemic and omnipresent human rights and environmental abuses in India's shrimp industry. As the largest representative body for small-scale fishworkers in West Bengal, we have long witnessed the impacts of intensive-shrimp farming on the environment and on the livelihoods of small-scale fishworkers in the state. More recently, with the expansion of non-farming activities such as processing plants in the coastal districts, the scale and extent of the impact is increasing. The ongoing nature of such harms and the fact that this has solely been caused by unchecked violations of environmental and labour norms constrains us to demand your immediate intervention in this matter. This is to ensure that the shrimp industry in West Bengal is immediately made to comply with relevant labour laws and environmental regulations.

In March 2024, the Corporate Accountability Lab, Outlaw Ocean, and the Associated Press all released reports on the devastating impacts of the shrimp industry on coastal ecologies, livelihoods, and labour well-being in India. These reports reiterate what coastal communities have long been protesting – shrimp farms, hatcheries, peeling sheds and processing units exploit workers, destroy the environment through the release of untreated effluents and over-salination of the soil and groundwater, and damage coastal fisheries which are the primary source of sustenance and livelihood for small-scale fishworkers. Most shrimp farms do not maintain the required stocking density as per the norms prescribed by the Coastal Aquaculture Authority. To manage the high density of stock and associated disease incidences, excessive inputs are used which result in the nutrient and chemical load of the shrimp farm effluents far exceeding the prescribed or permissible limits. It may be mentioned that this makes an ominous addition to the polluted and untreated waste-water, sewage and run-off (laden with chemicals)

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23/04/24

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Directorate of Fisheries
Govt. of West Bengal

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from non-farming activities and agriculture that are dumped in our waterways and into the sea. This alters the chemical composition of the near-shore waters directly impacting the fish cycle. This also devastates fisheries and leads to a sharp drop in fish numbers, particularly in the estuarine and near-shore waters where the small-scale fishworkers fish. On land, this release of effluents and other processing waste on the shore and around the farms contaminates sources of clean water that coastal communities rely upon for drinking and other daily needs. Moreover, the operation of these farms leads to increased salinity of the ground-water and the soil where these farms operate and also lowers the water-table by pumping in massive amounts of water for the operation of these farms. Cumulatively, this reduces the water supply for human needs and for agriculture in addition to rendering rich arable land barren due to over-salinization and water scarcity.

We at DMF have been calling the government's attention to the impacts of shrimp farming on multiple occasions including vide [Memo no. PMMF/A/41(1)/19] (copy enclosed). Most recently, we have also raised concerns regarding the development of shrimp processing units in Purba Medinipur. We have been particularly concerned that the shrimp industry's explosive growth has been in violation of existing environmental and labour laws and regulations. This point has been reiterated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India as far back as 1996 in the case of S. Jagannath. However, not only have the authorities not taken steps to implement the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in this matter, but efforts have also been made to legitimise the intensive shrimp production practices through the passage of laws such as the 2005 Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act and the 2023 Coastal Aquaculture Authority (Amendment) Act. Alarmingly, the new CAA Act now gives a clean chit for all forms of intensive aquaculture, including shrimp aquaculture, to operate outside the purview of environmental regulations. Thus, both by omission and commission, the state bears direct responsibility for the current state of affairs in relation to the shrimp industry.

In view of the new reports, we reiterate our long-standing demand for the state to immediately intervene in this urgent matter. The shrimp industry damages fisheries, fragile coastal ecologies, and the livelihoods of small-scale fishworkers by relentlessly polluting soil and water in addition to its wide-ranging exploitation of poor and marginalized workers. As the livelihoods of fishers are eroded by the shrimp industry, many are forced to seek daily-waged work in the shrimp industry under exploitative working conditions. For small-scale fishworkers and coastal communities, the ongoing state indifference to the damaging impacts of this industry violates their fundamental rights to life, livelihood, and to a clean and healthy environment as enshrined in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

It is imperative that the government should immediately take steps to ensure:

1. Implementation of all extant environmental protection and labour protection norms in relation to the shrimp industry. These include, at a minimum, the provisions of the Environment Protection Act 1986, the Coastal Regulation Zone Notifications, Inter-State Migrant Worker Act, the Minimum Wage Act, the Factories Act, the Contract Labour Act, the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, and the Prevention of Atrocities Act in addition to all relevant state legislations on the subject;

2. Repeal and withdrawal of the Coastal Aquaculture Authority (Amendment) Act, 2023;
3. Implementation of the guidelines and rules under the CAA Act pertaining to the regulation of shrimp farming and shrimp non-farming activities;
4. Identification of shrimp farms that are in violation of environmental laws and taking punitive measures including closing down of infringing farms with immediate effect.
5. Implementation of environmental best practices in coastal areas including by updating and implementing the Hon'ble Supreme Court's directions in the case of S. Jagannath v. Union of India;
6. Framing of new legislation in order to curb, control, and eliminate destructive and unsustainable forms of coastal aquaculture.

Thanking You,



Debasis Shyamal,
President,

Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum



DAKSHINBANGA MATSYAJIBI FORUM (DMF)

Trade Union Regn. No.20474\92. Affiliated to National Fishworkers' Forum(NFF)

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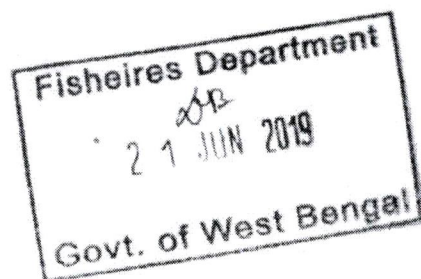
Date-21/06/19

To

1. The Member Secretary,
Coastal Aquaculture Authority,
Government of India,
Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare,
12-A, GDR Tower,
Bharathi Street, Vanuvampettai,
Tamil Nadu, Chennai - 600091

2. The Secretary,
West Bengal Fisheries Department,
BENFISH TOWER, 31 GN Block,
8th Floor, IT Building,
Salt Lake, Sector V,
Kolkata 700091

3. The District Magistrate & Collector,
Purba Medinipur,
Tamluk,
Administrative Building,
West Bengal, Pin - 721636



Sub: Complaint about
Water Pollution in coastal
stretches of East
Midnapore District due to
unregulated and illegal
prawn cultivation and
aquaculture activities.

Respected Sir,

This is to bring to your urgent attention that due to sudden increase of prawn cultivation and aquaculture (Bagda & Vannamei prawns) in and around the coastal areas of East Midnapore (Purba Medinipur) district of West Bengal, there has been massive environmental pollution, including marine pollution.

As these prawn farms are operating without any legal monitoring, in order to increase production overnight, they are using huge amounts of medicine and other chemicals, which are also contaminating the ground

water as well as flowing into the sea. The mandatory effluent treatment facilities are not in place. It is to be noted that most of these farms are not registered with the Coastal Aquaculture Authority or the Department of Fisheries, West Bengal, a situation resulting in lack of official monitoring. Many farmers have been complaining about the soil becoming saline and farmlands adjoining shrimp farms getting destroyed. Some of the specific complaints received from the members of the undersigned trade union are:

- a. Such destructive/illegal aquaculture is causing decrease in volume of water in canals and other water rivulets, adversely affecting aquatic life
- b. Canal waters are getting polluted
- c. The polluted water from canals is mixing with the riverine and marine water and inadvertently harming marine and riverine fish populations.
- d. This pollution is therefore causing tremendous loss of livelihood and is violating the right to life and livelihood of both marine as well as inland fish-workers of the said district of East Midnapore (Purba Medinipur)

It is pertinent to mention that "Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum" and its' district branch, "Purba Medinipur Matsyajibi Forum" have made several complaints to the "West Bengal Pollution Control Board" and to the Assistant Director of Fisheries (Brackish), Fisheries Department, Government of West Bengal vide letters dated 10th December, 2018, 12th December, 2018, 23rd May, 2019, and 24th May 2019 demanding among others, the following minimum actions:

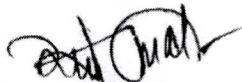
- a. Taking complaints from concerned and affected farmers and fishworkers of the said district;
- b. Investigating the nature and extent of pollution being caused by prawn culture and aquaculture activities in the said district;
- c. Publication of the findings of such investigation in the public domain and
- d. Meaningful and timely penal and remedial actions under the law, especially under the Aquaculture Authority Act, 2005 and its rules and regulations.

However, we are aggrieved to state and submit that despite our repeated complaints, no action has been taken till date and the situation on the ground is worsening by the day.

We therefore, urge you to take immediate action and co-ordinate amongst yourselves as well as with the West Bengal Pollution Control Board, to take all necessary action under the respective law and bring the situation under control and restore the damaged environment by:

- a. Deputing your officials, and arranging for an inspection, investigation into the matter;
- b. Taking statements and complaints from local fishworkers and farmers;
- c. Allowing the members of the undersigned trade unions to participate in investigation proceedings by deposing and bringing to light the polluted areas;
- d. Making available in the public domain the information of the findings of your investigation;
- e. Take stock of the environmental damage and restore the damaged areas;
- f. Take all necessary steps under the relevant law(s).

Thanking you,



(DEBASIS SHYAMAL)

Vice-President,

Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF)