



National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF) National Conference 2022

Resolution on Fishing Communities' (Fishers' & Fish Farmers') Right to Water

Fish workers' livelihood depends on fish absolutely. If there is no fish, there is no livelihood for fishers, fish farmers and allied workers. Fish needs water as habitat. Good fish needs good water.

Fishers and Fish Farmers need right to water to access water bodies to catch or farm fish and also to protect water bodies & fish resources.

At the ground level Fishing Communities' Right to Water means –

- A. **Right to access and use public water bodies or water commons (seas, rivers, reservoirs, lakes, wetlands etc.) sustainably for fishing or fish farming.** Access Rights mean right to use water bodies for fishing and fish farming as well as the right on land and water to enable the access. These rights are inalienable.
- B. **Right to Security of Tenure (Security of Lease) on private water bodies taken on rent for fish farming.** Security of Lease on private water bodies means proper and valid agreement, fixing of reasonable rent and increment thereof, guarantee against eviction.
- C. **Right to protect water bodies and fish resources (public and private) from encroachment, pollution, degradation, over and destructive fishing.** Right to protect water bodies and fish resources mean protecting water bodies with their catchment and drainage areas from encroachment and pollution, degradations due to unsustainable use of water, over fishing and destructive fishing methods like bottom trawling, purse seining, mosquito net fishing, use of poison, explosives, electric charge. Small scale fishers and fish farmers are by far the largest primary non-consumptive stakeholders of our water bodies. They are the natural custodians of our water bodies since good fish needs good water.

The present situation regarding fishing communities' Right to Water is –

Marine Waters: Legally unrecognised customary practices. Encroached and curtailed by competing interests with Government connivance.

Rivers: Generally legally unrecognised customary practices. In some states lease was given to fishers' cooperatives. Now almost non-existent. Encroached and curtailed by competing interests with Government connivance.

Reservoirs: No legally recognised user right. In many areas fishers' cooperatives are given lease holding rights to be auctioned from time to time. Selling rights are given to contractors.

Lakes, Wetlands, Backwaters: No legally recognised user right. In many areas fishers' cooperatives are given lease holding rights to be auctioned from time to time.

Ponds & Tanks: Generally given on lease to small fish farmers. No security of lease.

In view of the above NPSSF demands –

- ❖ Inalienable right of fishing communities to sustainably use all public water bodies for fishing and fish farming as well as the right to protect the water bodies and fish resources;
- ❖ 'Pani Patta' or title for water use right to be conferred to the community of fishers living by and using the concerned public water body in recognition of the above right and to be exercised collectively;
- ❖ Security of lease for small scale fish farmers using privately owned leasehold ponds or tanks – to ensure norms for fixation and increment of rent and protection against eviction.

All fish worker community organisations are to raise the demand for Right to Water in addressing the exclusion and eviction of fishing communities from the use, conservation and management of water bodies and fish resources.

Dt. November 9, 2022