



DAKSHINBANGA MATSYAJIBI FORUM (DMF)

Trade Union Regn. No.20474/92.

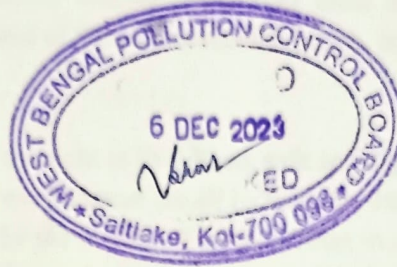
Affiliated to National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF)



Memo- DMF/President-31/23

Date: 06/12/2023

To
The Principal Secretary,
Department of Fisheries,
Government of West Bengal



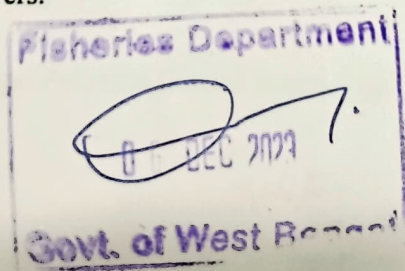
Sir,

Sub: Severe pollution, presumably from the effluents from the factories in Haldia, affecting livelihood of the small-scale fishers in Haldia

We are constrained to bring a matter of devastating pollution to your urgent attention. We are the Dakshin Banga Matsyajibi Forum, the largest representative organization of small-scale fishers in West Bengal. We are writing in relation to the high levels of pollution affecting the lives and livelihood of small-scale fishers in Haldia.

During the past two decades, growing levels of water pollution in the stretches of rivers adjacent to Haldia have become an increasing source of concern for fishers in Haldia. These fishers, mostly fishing at or near the confluence of Haldi-Hooghly Rivers, have come to realize that these river stretches have become unsuitable environments for fish breeding. As a consequence, many fishing families, members of the small-scale marginalized fishing community, have been forced to look for work elsewhere and have ended up working as construction labourers and in brick kilns—work completely alien to their traditional practices of fishing and related lifeways.

In the past few years, the situation has worsened. The fish that is caught in the area consistently emits a chemical stench while cooking. This has led to customer complaints and fishers have been forced to repay the customers for the fish sold. In some instances, violence by the customers against the fishers has also been noted. In fact, the consistent levels of pollution in the local fish have led to customers avoiding these fish in the city. This has negatively impacted the livelihood of small-scale fishers and has caused them great anguish and distress. This poses a grave threat to public health, as the common people are the consumers of the fish caught in the aforesaid stretches of the rivers.



We are deeply disappointed that the government agencies have not seen fit to study the extent and causes of the pollution and take necessary action, despite the fact that effluents from the industries in Haldia area can be observed to discharge in the waters concerned. As on this date, no study or investigation has been conducted in order to trace the released noxious effluents and/or the chemicals polluting the fish and identify the sources of these chemicals. No remediation and mitigation is possible without conducting these studies and investigations, which must also include an assessment of the environmental, health, social, and economic impact of these toxic chemicals.

We are sure that you are aware that the right to livelihood, safe and dignified conditions of work, and the right to a clean and healthy environment are all included in the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution as reiterated by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in a series of cases. The state also has an additional responsibility under Article 46 of the Constitution to promote the economic interests of the weaker sections of the population and to protect them from injustice. In the light of these fundamental Constitutional and legislative guarantees, we, the undersigned, demand the following:

1. Immediately initiate consultations with the local small-scale fishers in Haldia in order to document and assess the impact of chemical pollution on their lives and livelihoods
2. Conduct immediate and exhaustive studies on the toxic chemicals contaminating local fish in the Hooghly river stretches adjoining Haldia;
3. Identify the sources of the contaminants and take immediate and stringent action against the polluters;
4. Redress the impact of this pollution on small-scale fishers—including compensating them for their loss of livelihood.

Thanking you,

Debasis Shyamal
Debasis Shyamal

Copy forwarded for information and necessary action to the –

Memo- DMF/President-31(1)/23

Date:

✓ 1) Chairman, West Bengal Pollution Control Board.

Debasis Shyamal
President,
Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum