



DAKSHINBANGA MATSYAJIBI FORUM (DMF)

Trade Union Regn. No.20474/92.

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



Dated: 24.6.2024

Memo - DMF/President- 44/24

To
The Additional Chief Secretary,
Department of Fisheries
Government of West Bengal

The Member Secretary,
West Bengal State Pollution Control Board
Government of West Bengal

Dear Sir/Ma'am,

Sub: Request for action re severe pollution, presumably from Haldia factory effluents, destroying the water quality and devastating the livelihood of small-scale fishworkers in Haldia

We write in relation to our previous letter no. DMF/President-31/23 dated 6 December 2023 (attached to this letter as Annexure 1) where we brought a matter of devastating chemical pollution in Haldia to your urgent attention. We are the Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum, the largest representative organization of small-scale fishworkers in West Bengal.

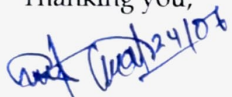
In our previous letter we described how the high levels of pollution are affecting the lives and livelihood of small-scale fishers in Haldia. However, in the six months that have passed since our initial letter, it appears that the government has not taken any action to investigate our serious concerns around severe pollution of the river at Haldia. No consultations have been conducted with any member of the small-scale fishworker community and we have not been intimated by the government of any study or investigation into the toxic effluents being illegally discharged into the Haldia river. No effort has been made to engage with the fishing community's concerns; a concern that is highly urgent given that our experience on the ground as recently as last Friday, the 21st of June, suggests that the polluting activities continue unabated

We are shocked at the government's dereliction of its duty and responsibility towards the lives and livelihoods of small-scale fishworkers and towards the environment of the Haldia-Hooghly riverine area. The Fisheries Department is directly concerned with fish health and the welfare of the fishing community and the Pollution Control Board's mandate specifically includes monitoring the quality of the state's rivers and other water bodies and preventing pollution of

these resources. Therefore, we are astonished at their apparent lack of concern towards the appalling state of affairs at Haldia.

In the light of the fundamental Constitutional and legislative guarantees towards small-scale fishers and in the interests of preventing the devastation of their lives and livelihoods in Haldia, we, the undersigned, demand that the state authorities take action on the demands outlined in our previous letter. Moreover, if any of those actions have been or are being taken, we demand to be informed and consulted about them.

Thanking you,



Debasis Shyamal
President

Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum
20/4, Sil Lane, Kolkata-700015



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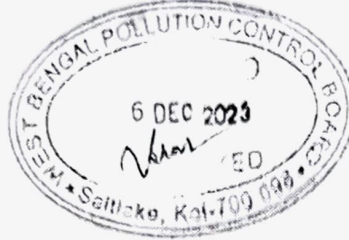
Affiliated to National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (NPSSF)



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.

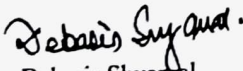
Principal Secretary
6 DEC 2023
Govt. of West Bengal

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,

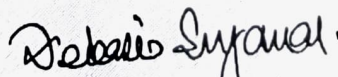

Debasis Shyamal

Copy forwarded for information and necessary action to the –

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

Date:

✓ 1) Chairman, West Bengal Pollution Control Board.


President,
Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum