

NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR SMALL SCALE FISHWORKERS (INLAND)

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March 29, 2019

STATEMENT

NPSSF (I) Demands Small Scale Fishers' & Fish Farmers' Right to Water Bodies

Indicts National Political Parties for their Failure to keep their promises to fish workers

National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers represents Small Scale Fish Workers of India. It is a national association of organisations representing small scale fish workers of different states. To date from Manipur to Maharashtra, from Andhra Pradesh to Kashmir 16 organisations working with small scale fish workers in 10 states have joined it. The states include – Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Kashmir, Manipur, Jharkhand, Gujarat and West Bengal.

Producing 11 million tonnes of fish in a year, second largest in the world and having a fish eating population of more than 80 crores and 15 million fish workers, the fisheries sector plays very important role in respect of food security, nutritional status and employment in our country.

The small scale fishing communities are by far the largest non-consumptive primary stakeholders and natural custodians of our water bodies. Everywhere they fight to protect water and protect fish resources. Because good fish needs good water.

Encroachments, pollution, indiscriminate consumptive use of water from the water bodies are destroying them and their fish resources. On top of it overfishing by large scale mechanised fishing boats are making our seas barren of fish.

The small and traditional fishing communities are driven out from the waters falling under protected areas as well on the pretext of conserving the water bodies and water life.

Sagarmala, coastal merchant shipping corridor, industrial and economic corridors, National Water Ways, schemes and projects under blue revolution and blue economy are all intended to open up our water bodies to big business and corporate investors with utter disregard of the environmental importance and ecological services of the water bodies and the livelihood of millions of small scale fish workers.

Most ironically fish or fishing communities find no mention in the national water policy of our country.

This is happening because the fishing communities have no legally recognised right over the water bodies in our country. Legally they are a non-entity with no visibility. Water and water bodies are freely impacted by government policies without even consulting them, let alone taking their informed consent.

The National Platform for Small Scale Fish Workers (I) demands Small Scale Fish Workers' right to water. The small scale fishers and fish farmers want security of tenure on water bodies for fishing and fish farming as well as on land for pre and post harvest activities.

We take this opportunity to state that the fisheries sector in general and the small scale fisheries sector in particular are neglected and laid up by the policies of the Union Government for long. Promises given by the ruling parties before the elections are forgotten by them after the elections. During the present BJP Government this has reached untold proportions.

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In 2014, before coming to power the BJP had published its national policy on fisheries, there it promised to do many things but little has been done –

- **BJP had promised to protect traditional fishing communities from overfishing** in the sea by mechanised vessels; but in effect the BJP government has promoted overfishing by subsidising them and by not imposing any restriction over indiscriminate loot of marine fish resources;
- **BJP had promised to contain unbridled pollution** of the sea by industrial effluents and domestic sewage, particularly by thermal power plants; but actually the BJP government has not only failed to contain pollution but also has promoted it by installation of new thermal power plants and all kinds of polluting industries and activities along the coast;
- **BJP had promised to restrict land acquisition along the coast** to protect the coastal fishing communities from eviction due to SEZs, ports, thermal plants and other industries; but in effect the BJP government has introduced Sagarmala project to install large number of ports all along the coast, coastal industrial and economic corridors, large scale tourism and other industries as ‘Blue Economy Growth’ to expedite eviction of traditional fishing communities from the coast. It has thrown open the floodgate of encroachment and destruction of the coast by approving CRZ 2018 Notification superseding CRZ 2011 Notification.
- **BJP had promised to protect mangroves** as buffer from the gust of cyclones and sea surge as well as nursery of fish; but in effect the BJP government has allowed conversion of mangrove forests by lifting all CRZ restrictions on those.
- **BJP had promised to bring about a fresh water fishing policy;** at the fag end of their tenure, by the end of last month, have published one draft National Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy (NIFAP), which is full of hollow statements without any direction for action.
- **BJP had promised to prepare an inventory of pools along the rivers and declare rivers, flood plain lakes, wetlands and pools as protected areas for fish;** but actually the BJP government has fuelled destruction of river ecosystems by projects like River Linking and National Waterways let alone huge number of thermal power plants and industries sanctioned on river basins.
- **BJP had promised to promote fishing community cooperatives in natural and government owned large water bodies** like lakes, wetlands and reservoirs; but in reality the BJP government has expedited the eviction of traditional fisher people from the water bodies by promoting a new breed of entrepreneurs through schemes under Blue Revolution which is dedicated to investment led increase of fish production.

BJP has taken to a new and record level the sell out of our natural resources to corporate and business houses, ostensibly to please them for getting a share of the ransom.

But BJP is no exception –

- In 2011 Sri Jairam Ramesh, Ex-Minister in charge of MoEF in the Congress led UPA Government promised to enact a Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Act instead of the present CRZ Notification to comprehensively and effectively protect coastal natural resources and

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ensure livelihood of small scale fishing communities. Nothing was done in the next three years that the Congress was in power.

- In 2012, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced the need of having a Small Scale Fishing Communities' Rights Act as the Forest Dwellers Act to protect the fishing communities' right to life and livelihood. Nothing was done in the next two years that the Congress was in power.

In view of this, the small scale fishing communities refuse to be deceived again by the ruling political parties and warn them that the political parties are going to be judged by them not by their promises but by their deed.

We notify all political parties and the government that will take over after the parliamentary elections that they must recognise the small and traditional fishing communities' inalienable right over water bodies of the country. No policy decision on water and water bodies should be taken without the active participation and mandatory informed consent of the fishing communities.

Signatures:

1. **Pradip Chatterjee (National Convener)**
2. **Soumen Ray (National Coordinator)**
3. **Dipak Dholakia (Delhi Office Coordinator)**
4. **Oinam Rajen Singh (Manipur)**
5. **Dr. Gulam Rasool (Kashmir)**
6. **Nalinikant (Bihar)**
7. **Hement Das (Jharkhand)**
8. **Narayan Chandra Haldar (Odisha)**
9. **Debasis Pal (Andhra Pradesh)**
10. **Neelkanth Mishra (Maharashtra)**
11. **Milan Das (West Bengal)**

**NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR SMALL SCALE FISH WORKERS
PRESS CONFERENCE
29 MARCH 2019 3.00PM TO 5.00PM
PRESS CLUB, NEW DELHI**