

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL TIGER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY HELD ON 28TH NOVEMBER, 2006

The first meeting of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was held under the Chairmanship of the Minister for Environment and Forests at New Delhi on 28th November, 2006.

At the outset, the Secretary (Environment and Forests) welcomed the participants, and highlighted the background for creating the Tiger Conservation Authority, vis-à-vis the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force, for improving the institutional systems of governance to strengthen tiger conservation in the country. This was followed by the introduction of members of the Tiger Conservation Authority and other participants, and address by the Minister of Environment and Forests and the Chairman of the Authority.

The Chairman stated that Project Tiger has been under implementation since 1973 as a Scheme of the Government of India. Since then, the Project coverage has increased over the years from the initial 9 Tiger Reserves to 28 reserves at present. As many as 17 States are involved in the field implementation of this Project. The Govt. of India had taken up this project to promote conservation of the tiger. Management of forests and wildlife is primarily the responsibility of concerned States. Hence the field implementation of the project, protection and management in the designated reserves is done by the project States, who also provide matching grants to recurring items of expenditure, deploy field staff/officers, and pay their salaries. The Project Tiger Directorate of the Ministry of Environment and Forests is mandated to provide technical guidance and funding support. The Tiger Reserves are faced with ecological disturbances and various other problems. Fragmentations of habitats occur owing to overuse of forest habitats, apart from conflicting land uses leading to loss of habitat. Such overuse of forest resources distorts the forest dynamics, thereby affecting the habitat quality to support natural prey base and natal areas for tigers to breed. There are also in some cases, significant resident population in villages, with many cattle which graze in the forests, leading to their ecological degradation, apart from major sources of regular or intermittent disturbance, such as temples, and commercial entities such as tea estates. This also leads to man-animal conflicts, resulting in tiger and prey mortality.

The Chairman further said that several constraints affect field implementation of the project, i.e. delayed release of Central Assistance given to the States for Field Units, staff vacancies, ageing of field staff, lack of capacity building initiatives, weak enforcement and monitoring of protection work, etc. The events in the recent past have highlighted the fact that there is need in the States for greater commitment and vigilance. The field administration managing the tiger reserves require capacity building and supervision. There is also an urgent need to strengthen the system at the Central Government level (Project Tiger Directorate), which has the mandate to oversee and guide tiger conservation in the country. Involvement of Parliament is also required to ensure review and

guidance. Likewise, involvement of Chief Ministers of States and strengthening the field administration, supervision of the project and building a participatory base by including interests of local people living in and around tiger reserves are extremely important.

Considering the urgency of the situation and the exigencies involved, statutory authority has been accorded to Project Tiger, apart from creating the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, as recommended by the Tiger Task Force. The Wildlife (Protection) Act has been amended and the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 has been enacted, which has come into force with effect from 4th September, 2006. The amendments would address the ecological as well as administrative concerns for conserving tigers, by providing a statutory basis for protection of tiger reserves, and providing strengthened institutional mechanisms for the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and endangered species. The Authority would ensure enforcement of guidelines for tiger conservation, and monitoring compliance of the same, apart from placement of motivated and trained officers having good track record as Field Directors of tiger reserves. It would also facilitate capacity building of officers and staff posted in tiger reserves, apart from a time bound staff development plan. The provisions of the recent amendment to the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 takes care of ecological and administrative concerns for conserving tigers by creating the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, and also addresses livelihood concerns as well as man-wild animal conflicts in the fringe areas of tiger reserves.

Thereafter, the agenda items were discussed, and the details of deliberations are as below:

Agenda Item No. 1

Measures to make the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) functional

(a) & (b) Transfer of posts / staff / assets of Project Tiger to the NTCA

Secretary (E&F) stated that pursuant to the proviso under Section 38N (1) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 2006, which has already come into force with effect from 4th September, 2006, all officers and employees holding office under the Directorate of Project Tiger and dealing with Project Tiger immediately before the date of constitution of the Tiger Conservation Authority are continuing in the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The members of the Authority are being apprised of the same for information.

Decision : NTCA was apprised of agenda items 1 (a) & (b).

(c),(d)&(e) Declaring the Member Secretary (NTCA) as “Head of Department” of the Authority, constitution of a Committee for structuring the rules/guidelines relating to delegation of administrative and financial

Powers to the Member Secretary, National Tiger Conservation Authority, constitution of Administrative and Financial Committees of the NTCA

Discussion on the above agenda items were deferred, since the Secretary (E&F) stated there was need for further discussion on the issues within the Ministry for taking a final view on these aspects.

Decision: Deferred till the next meeting of the NTCA.

Agenda Item No. 2

Approval of grants for the current financial year and approach paper for the XIth Five Year Plan

(a)& (b) Grants for the current financial year and continuation of the process till the next financial year

Discussion on this item was not felt necessary, since the funding support to States under the ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger has already been provided to States during the current financial year. Shri H. S. Panwar, expert member NTCA highlighted the need for finalizing the operational guidelines in this regard to avoid delay. Prof. Sukumar, expert member NTCA desired the need for co-opting more NTCA members in the Committee proposed for finalizing the guidelines. Secretary (E&F), while taking note of the views of members stated that the existing process of fund release would continue till March, 2007 and the operational guidelines would be finalized soon.

Decision: the existing process of fund release would continue till March, 2007 and the operational guidelines would be finalized soon.

(d) & (e) Creation of a separate budget head for the NTCA and releasing central assistance directly to the Tiger Conservation Foundation to be established in tiger reserves as per the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006

The item relating to creation of a separate budget head for the NTCA was not discussed as the same was related to the final decision of the Ministry on agenda items 1 (c), (d) & (e).

Decision: Deferred till the next meeting of the NTCA.

(f) Approach paper for the XIth Five Year Plan

Secretary (E&F) stated that the exercise relating to XI Plan proposal was already ongoing, and hence the item should be discussed with the sub group constituted for the purpose. The Member–Secretary (MS)–NTCA stated that the items in the

agenda and allocations proposed against them were based on proposals received from tiger reserves, for appraisal of the NTCA. Shri H.S.Panwar, expert member NTCA while appreciating the items proposed in the approach paper, felt that allocation for mainstreaming livelihood and wildlife concerns in forests outside tiger reserves should be enhanced. Secretary, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, desired that more allocation to benefit people living inside tiger reserves should be done, apart from enhancing allocations for capacity building of staff and initiatives to address man-wildlife conflicts. PCCF & CWLW, Madhya Pradesh stated that there should be a separate scheme for mainstreaming wildlife concerns outside the protected area system. He also felt that the Tiger Conservation Foundation should not have a two tiered structure (i.e. at the tiger reserve as well as the State levels), since this would cause delay in the process for fund release and defeat the purpose of creating the foundation. The MS-NTCA clarified that the Tiger Conservation Foundation as required under Section 38X of the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 requires establishment of such foundations only in tiger reserves, and the States may have a State level Governing Body to oversee their functioning. Secretary (E&F) stated that funding support can be made available to the Tiger Conservation Foundation, as done in the case of Forest Development Agencies. The Chairman emphasized the need for registering the Tiger Conservation Foundation. The MS-NTCA stated that guidelines are being framed in this regard, and the said foundations are required to be registered as a 'trust' within the ambit of prevailing rules. Secretary, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, stated that the villages to be relocated from tiger reserves and protected areas should be identified on a priority basis. Secretary (E&F) informed that the Wildlife Institute of India has already been mandated with this task with a time frame of five years. Dr Archana Prasad, expert member NTCA stated that as per the recommendations of the Tiger Task Force, the villages for relocation should be decided on the basis of the Phase –I data of the All India Tiger estimation, apart from following the due consultation process. Prof. Gopal Kadekodi, expert member, NTCA expressed satisfaction that the issue of livelihood is being addressed. He stressed the need for enhancing the allocation for the same in the plan proposal. He further emphasized the need for more allocations to research and monitoring /evaluation. Secretary (E&F) updated the members on the completion of independent monitoring of tiger reserves and its IUCN review. Prof. Sukumar stated that the Planning Commission should be apprised of the new provisions of the NTCA and the concept of the Foundation, since XIth Plan discussions are on. CWLW, Uttaranchal stated that proposal for habitat improvement should also be included in the plan proposal. PCCF & CWLW, Madhya Pradesh stated that guidelines on the role of NTCA in funding should be issued vis-à-vis the areas linking one tiger reserve or protected area to another, in the light of the fact that such areas have been brought within the ambit of the NTCA.

Decision: The views of the members were taken into consideration towards finalizing the plan proposal of NTCA for onward transmission to the Working Group constituted by the Planning Commission for the purpose.

Agenda item No. 3

Implementation of Tiger Task Force recommendations

(a) Formation of state level steering committee

Several Chief Wildlife Wardens (M.P., Rajasthan) were of the view that the State Wildlife Advisory Boards are already in place under the Chairmanship of the State Chief Ministers, as required under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Hence, the constitution of State level Steering Committees would amount to duplication. Prof. Sukumar and Shri H. S. Panwar, expert members NTCA pointed out that many State Wildlife Advisory Boards have not met since long, and several States have not constituted them at all. CWLW, Tamil Nadu suggested delegation of powers to the existing State Wildlife Advisory Boards to function as Steering Committees; CWLW, Rajasthan stated that this may not be possible since constitution of Steering Committee is required under the Act. Secretary (E&F) stated that this issue may be revisited to explore the possibility of the State Wildlife Advisory Board serving the functions of the Steering Committee. Secretary (E&F) stated that constitution of State level Steering Committees are important since several departments are involved in the development of areas surrounding a tiger reserve which require coordination and convergence of efforts in the interest of tiger conservation. This can be best achieved only if the Chief Minister heads the Steering Committee.

Decision: The Chairman made it clear that since the law requires constitution of the State level Steering Committees under the Chief Ministers to ensure the necessary political will for tiger conservation, they need to be constituted at the earliest.

(b) Independent assessment of tiger reserves

Prof. Madhav Gadgil, expert member, NTCA expressed satisfaction over the fact that the independent assessment reports relating to tiger reserves have been put in the public domain(Project Tiger website). He suggested that a 'wikipedia' should be developed which would prove useful to people dealing with the subject. Secretary (E&F) suggested formation of a Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof. Madhav Gadgil with expert members for refining the monitoring parameters and suggesting related improvement relating to creation of wikipedia in the public domain.

Decision: Formation of a Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof. Madhav Gadgil with expert members for refining the monitoring parameters and suggesting related improvement relating to creation of wikipedia in the public domain.

(c) Develop network with researchers for fostering field research

Secretary, Ministry of Social justice and empowerment stated that this was an important item and needs to be given due importance. Chief Wildlife Warden (M.P.) informed that the research guidelines have been recently finalized by the National Board for Wildlife, and the same should be taken into consideration. Further, he stated that the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 provides for the NTCA to approve research in tiger reserves, which would curtail the powers of the Chief Wildlife Wardens who have the legal mandate in this regard at present. IGF (Wildlife) informed that NTCA would approve only those research projects which are funded by it, and hence may not intervene in proposals brought directly to State Chief Wildlife Wardens. The Minister of State and Vice Chairperson of the NTCA stated that guidelines can be issued in this regard for clarification. Dr Archana Prasad, expert member NTCA endorsed the views of Prof. Gadgil for structuring the desired networking with experts outside the NTCA as well. Prof. Gadgil expressed the need for using modern technology in this regard in coordination with the National Biodiversity Authority. Shri H. S. Panwar expert member, NTCA stated that the Wildlife Institute of India would be an ideal node for developing the networking. The MS –NTCA suggested that recommendations for networking may be entrusted to the Committee constituted earlier under the Chairmanship of Prof. Gadgil, which was agreed to.

Decision : A Committee was constituted to suggest refinement for monitoring , its dissemination in the public domain and networking amongst researchers with the following composition :

***Prof .Madhav Gadgil , Expert Member, NTCA –Chairman
Prof. Gopal Kadekodi, Expert Member, NTCA—Member
Prof. Anil Gore, Expert Member, NTCA –Member
Dr. Archana Prasad, Expert Member, NTCA—Member
Shri H.S.Panwar, Expert Member, NTCA –Member
Director, Wildlife Institute of India --Member
Member Secretary (NTCA)—Member Convener***

(d),(e),(f),(h) Evolving detailed, site-specific protection strategy and evaluation of plans for their improvement

- **Discussion on specific strategy in insurgency and naxalite areas**
- **Appraisal of field vacancies in each reserve**
- **Preparing specific programme targeted to hunting tribes in each reserve**

MS-NTCA apprised the members that the reserve specific recommendations contained in the independent assessment of tiger reserves would form the basis of evolving site specific strategy for protection. However, involvement of local work force for protection is extremely important, since it would provide livelihood in the form of wages to the stakeholder communities. This approach was unanimously approved. Shri H. S. Panwar, expert member, NTCA highlighted the field vacancies in tiger reserves and the ageing of field staff owing to ban on

recruitment. Secretary (E&F) stated that a time period of six months from the commencement of the next financial year should be prescribed for the States to fill up the field vacancies on a priority basis. The Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Arunachal Pradesh stated that due to inaccessible terrain even the paramilitary forces find it difficult to patrol some remote areas in the State, and hence the situation is challenging. Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs stated that it is important to recruit the locals, and this may require relaxing the prescribed qualifications. Secretary (E&F) endorsed this view and remarked that States may consider relaxing the qualifications to enable recruitment of locals. CWLW, Rajasthan stated that there is no provision at present in the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for supporting staff, and some posts are required to be sanctioned by the Central Government. The MS-NTCA informed that during the formulation of the Xth Plan it was decided that central assistance should not be provided for supporting staff, which should be done by States. The Chairman stated that in very difficult situations the possibility of supporting field staff through central assistance should be explored. Prof. Madhav Gadgil stated that it is not necessary to appoint local people on the pay rolls of the Government, but they can be best deployed as work force for protection with wages from the central assistance. Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj stated that most of the tiger reserves fall in Schedule-V and VI areas, and hence the NTCA should involve the Ministry of Panchayati Raj while preparing a road map for involving the local people, and provision exists in central schemes for supporting capacity building. Prof. Gopal Kadekodi, expert member, NTCA stated that some NGOs having expertise in this regard should be involved. CWLW, Tamil Nadu desired that field staff should also be involved since they have the first hand knowledge of the situation. Secretary (E&F) suggested a broad based committee involving the NTCA experts and representatives from the Ministries of Tribal Affairs, Panchayati Raj and Social Justice and Empowerment, Home Affairs (Internal Security) and CWLWs of affected States for suggesting suitable redressal measures, which was approved.

Decision: (i) The local workforce comprising of local people should be deployed for protection. In view of the paucity of frontline staff in many tiger reserves, State should launch a special recruitment drive for filling up frontline field staff vacancies. Preference should be given to local forest dwelling people, by if necessary, relaxing the prescribed qualifications for such posts. The process needs to be completed within a time frame of six months from the start of the coming financial year (2007-08).

(ii) A broad based Committee was constituted for suggesting redressal strategy, with the following composition:

Prof. Gopal Kadekodi - Chairman

Prof. R.Sukumar - member

Dr.Jamal Khan - member

Dr. Archana Prasad - member

Representative, Ministry of Home Affairs (Internal Security)-member

Representative, Ministry of Tribal Affairs-member

Representative, Ministry of Panchayati Raj-member
Representative, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment-member
Experts (Social Science, Ecology)-members
MS-NTCA-member convener

(g), (j),(k),(l) , (m),(n),(o)

- **Creation of a database on tiger related crimes**
- **Finalise the list of priority villages that need to be relocated, based on the Phase-1 of census and specific situation in each reserve**
- **Based on the list of priority villages, working on schedule with state government to relocate villages and allocate funds**
- **Review the package of relocation from tiger reserves. Developing strategies for each tiger reserve towards joint collaborative-inclusive management**
- **Review of eco-development strategies in buffer/fringe areas and working out special package in collaboration with territorial forest/revenue departments.**
- **Preparation of reserve specific plan for eco-tourism, which should include money from gates to be used in reserve, allocation of eco-tourism activities for local people etc.**

Many of the above items were discussed earlier while deliberating on agenda item 2 (f) regarding the approach for the XIth Plan. There was a general consensus on the line of action suggested in the agenda notes vis-à-vis the above items, which was approved.

Decision:

- ***Till the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau becomes operational, it is necessary to have a contractual arrangement by deploying Data Entry Operators and Data Analysts for collating the information on a day-to-day basis from State Authorities, Field Organisations, and Regional Offices of MoEF***
- ***Finalising the list of priority villages that need to be relocated in consultation with the WII based on the Phase –I data of the All India Tiger estimation, since the Institute is already mandated with the task***
- ***Based on the finalized list of priority villages, working on schedule with state government to relocate villages and allocate funds***
- ***Review the package of village relocation from tiger reserves with the professional agency already mandated with the task***
- ***Developing strategies for each tiger reserve towards joint-collaborative- inclusive management by fostering demonstration case studies***

- **Review by NTCA members of eco-development strategies in buffer/fringe areas and working out special packages in collaboration with territorial forest/revenue departments**
- **Review of reserve specific plan for eco-tourism, which should include money from gates to be used in reserve, allocation of eco-tourism activities for local people**
- **A Monitoring Committee was constituted as below for monitoring the progress of implementation of Tiger Task Force recommendations:**

DIG (WL), MoEF

- Member

Joint Director (WL), MoEF

- Member

Joint Director (NTCA)

-Member Convener

(i) Finalize phase 1 data of All India tiger estimation for all states by December 2006, phase 1, 2 and 3 for MP, which is the major tiger bearing state by December 2006, and rest by June 2007

(This was discussed in the next agenda item).

Agenda Item No. 4

Status of All India Tiger estimation

The MS–NTCA gave an update on the status of the All India Tiger Estimation. He informed that the results on tiger distribution and status in the country would be available by December 2006; the results relating to tiger numbers in Central India would be available by December 2006, and for rest of the country by July 2007. Director, WII informed that while Phase-I, II and III results relating to Madhya Pradesh would be available by December, 2006, the Phase –I data of the rest of the country would be finalized by January, 2007, and the other Phases (II & III) by July, 2007.

Director, WII also sought the views of members on whether the day- to-day monitoring should be done using the refined process as institutionalized during the recent tiger estimation. This was raised by CWLW, Uttaranchal also. The MS-NTCA informed that the new methodology should be institutionalized as a protocol, as intended. Secretary (E&F) stated that a lot of legacy data is available which is difficult to analyze for want of a uniform, standardized protocol for data collection, hence the new methodology should be institutionalized for day to day data collection. This was endorsed by Shri H. S. Panwar and Dr. Jamal Khan, expert members, NTCA.

Decision: The Authority endorsed the time frame relating to the completion of data analysis relating to the All India Tiger Estimation.

The adoption and institutionalization of the new, refined protocol for day to day field data collection, as standardized in the All India Estimation was approved.

Agenda Item No. 5

Review of protection status / tiger mortality

The items included in this agenda were discussed under Agenda items (2f) and (3) earlier, and a line of action on the same was also adopted. Hence, no further discussion took place on these items.

Agenda Item No. 6

Proposed infrastructure and staff requirement for the National Tiger Conservation Authority

Considering the lack of infrastructure and paucity of officers and staff the proposal as contained in the agenda notes was approved for strengthening the NTCA.

Decision:

(a) Creation of office space and related infrastructure for the NTCA by procuring land and constructing a new office building as per existing norms in consultation with the Ministry of Urban Development

(b) Creation of a monitoring lab in the Wildlife Institute of India having a fully equipped GIS lab in the WII campus, with a data entry operator, two GIS technicians, one senior wildlife biologist for continuing the monitoring and placing the results in the public domain on a regular basis

(c) the following additional manpower for the NTCA was approved:

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|---|---------------------|
| <i>(i) DIG (Forests)</i> | <i>- One</i> |
| <i>(ii) AIG (Forests)</i> | <i>- One</i> |
| <i>(iii) Finance Officer</i> | <i>- One</i> |
| <i>(iv) Registrar</i> | <i>- One</i> |
| <i>(v) Peons</i> | <i>- Two</i> |
| <i>(vi) Data Entry Operators</i> | <i>- Two</i> |
| <i>(vii) Data Analyst</i> | <i>- One</i> |
| <i>(viii) Programmer</i> | <i>- One</i> |

Agenda Item No. 7

Implementation of the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 by Tiger States

The Authority took note of the following statutory requirements on which compliance is required from tiger range States for implementing the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2006:

- (i) Constitution of Steering Committee as required under section 38U of the said Act.
- (ii) Preparation of Tiger Conservation Plan as required under section 38V of the said Act.
- (iii) Establishment of Tiger Conservation Foundation as required under section 38X of the said Act.

Decision:

1. The Authority did not prescribe a time frame at this stage for compliance of the above provisions by States. However, it was decided that directives should be sent to the States in this regard for early compliance.

2. The Authority approved in principle, preparation of a draft Memorandum of Understanding between NTCA and States for reinforcing tiger conservation measures in the country, which would be discussed in its next meeting.

Agenda Item No. 8

Clarification on concerns vis-à-vis Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006

Chief Wildlife Wardens of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Orissa sought clarifications on some provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006. The issues were deliberated at length and the MS-NTCA stated that there was no repeal of earlier provisions in the recent amendment to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, and the new provisions were complementary in nature. Shri G. K. Prasad, DGF & SS stated that the matter could be discussed with the Chief Wildlife Wardens to explain the factual position. The Chairman directed that the clarification included in the agenda notes should be issued after vetting by the Ministry of Law & Justice.

Decision: Issue of clarification as suggested in the agenda notes after due vetting by the Ministry of Law & Justice.

Agenda item No. 9 Convergence of redirected development inputs of different Ministries in rural tracts around tiger reserves and other important biodiversity bearing PAs

(From Shri H. S. Panwar, expert member, NTCA)

The agenda notes as received from the member were circulated to the members in advance. Shri Panwar, highlighted the fact that mainstreaming wildlife concerns in the landscape was extremely important, and should not be left to only the Ministry of Environment and Forests, since this necessitated convergence of several schemes from various departments. He invited reference to the report of the Task Force appointed by the Indian Board for Wildlife in 1983 to elicit public support for conservation. The suggestions of the Task Force are relevant even today, and should be taken into consideration during the formulation of the XIth Plan. Further, the MoEF, as a part of the EIA clearance process could levy a compensatory charge, which should be credited to a dedicated fund for providing livelihood opportunities. Funds available with the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Environment and Forests and Fisheries Department should be used for the welfare of field dwellers in a community participatory mode.

Decision:

The suggestions were noted for discussion with the working group constituted by the Planning Commission for structuring the XIth Plan proposals.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, members and participants by the MS-NTCA.
