

**BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
(SOUTHERN ZONE BENCH, CHENNAI)**

ORIGINAL APPLICATION NO. 227 OF 2024(SZ)

In the matter of:

Tribunal on its own motion SUO MOTU based on the news item published in The Hindu, Chennai edition paper dated 30.07.2024, titled **"Wayanad landslides Live updates : 54 killed, over 100 feared missing in Kerala hill station; relief operations delayed"**.

-VS-

Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate change and
State of kerala


.....Respondent(s)

REPORT FILED BY THE FOREST AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
9TH RESPONDENT

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Dated at Chennai on this the 27th day of March, 2025.

for 

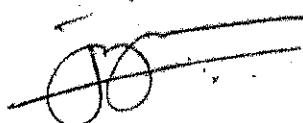
M/s. E.K.KUMARESAN

Standing Counsel for State Government of Kerala - NGT(SZ) Chennai Bench

Report filed by the 9th Respondent in compliance with Order dated 27.09.2024 of Hon'ble National Green Tribunal, Southern Zone Chennai, Suo Motu Order in OA No 227 of 2024

It is submitted that the Hon'ble National Green Tribunal during the hearings on 02.08.2024, Suo Motu initiated OA No. 227 of 2024, based on the news item published in The Hindu, Chennai edition e-paper, regarding the massive landslide struck on the hill ranges of Wayanad. The Hon'ble NGT directed the submission of a report detailing the root cause of the landslide, including an assessment of factors such as quarrying activities, commercial building construction, other construction activities, and natural calamities. Subsequently, by order dated 27/09/2024, Hon'ble National Green Tribunal impleaded the Forest and Wildlife Department of Kerala as the 9th respondent and directed the submission of an independent report regarding afforestation, encroachment, action taken etc.

2. It is submitted that Exotic plantations of Eucalyptus, Acacia, Wattle were planted by Kerala Forest Department for industrial purposes in 1960s. It was to cater to the demands of industries at that time. An extent of 7622.0410 Ha Acacia auriculiformis, 2291.417 Ha Acacia mangium, 6780.230 Ha Eucalyptus and 1758.210 Ha of Wattle plantations are at present in the forests of Kerala. With the changing perspective of forest management, the Department has now embarked upon phasing out exotic monoculture plantations due to their ecological incompatibility. There is no planting of exotic species being carried out in the forests of Kerala now. The planting of wattle was stopped since 1992, that of Acacia auriculiformis, Acacia mangium since 2018 & of Eucalyptus since 2019. A detailed eco-restoration plan for reverting Eucalyptus, Acacia auriculiformis, Acacia mangium and Wattle plantation to their natural state or replanting with indigenous species was drawn up for necessary



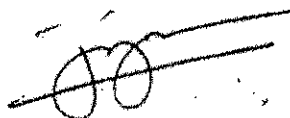
follow through in furtherance of the same. As per Government Order (MS) No. 29/2021 dated 17.12.2021, Government of Kerala has approved the Eco-restoration Policy. The Policy covers all of the exotic monoculture plantations of Eucalyptus, Acacia & Wattle in the forests for their phased removal and consequent restoration to natural state or planted with suitable indigenous species. It envisages the eradication of the exotics and the eco-restoration of these areas over the next two decades.

3. Since the adoption of this policy, Exotic plantations covering an extent of 5585.57 Ha had been treated for removal from the forests of Kerala and an extent of 1346.54 Ha have been planted by indigenous species from 2022 onwards.

4. For removal of Invasive Alien species like *Senna Spectabilis* from the areas protected and reserved forests of Wayanad, species-specific management protocols have been developed by KFRI to control the current spread of the invasive population and prevent reproduction, so as to stop the further spread through flowering and fruiting. Based on these protocols, *Senna Spectabilis* are being removed from Wayanad landscape. In North Wayanad Division *Senna* has been removed from 77 Ha. The phasing out from the remaining area is under process. In Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, 821 Ha of senna-infested area has been cleared of senna and in the remaining 927 Ha of area, eradication of senna is under progress.

5. A total extent of 78.009761 ha of forest land has been diverted for non-forestry purposes (stage II clearance) in the last 10 years in the State of Kerala. Against diversion of forest lands for non-forest purposes, an extent of 171.83 ha have been taken up for Compensatory Afforestation during the past five years.

6. The site-specific activities as per section 6(a) of the Compensatory

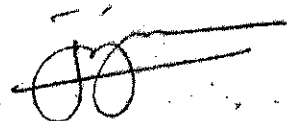


Afforestation Fund Act, 2016 with respect to Compensatory Afforestation includes advance soil preparations, nursery raising, raising plantation, etc. Since 2010 an extent of 287.36 Ha Plantation has been raised and maintenance of 212.31 Ha done in existing plantations as a part of afforestation. Also, soil and moisture conservation works like gully plugging and check dam construction have been conducted.

7. Further under the 'Navakiranam' voluntary relocation project funded under the Rebuild Kerala Development Programme (RKDP) and Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB), an extent of 128.64 Ha (89.4 Ha under RKDP and 39.24 Ha under KIIFB) has been identified for restoration as forests. These lands falling within forests as enclosures having non forest status or adjoining forests are identified for relocation and are taken up under eco-restoration efforts for resumption back as forests.

8. With regard to forest areas of Western Ghats falling within Kerala, the Department has already identified the disaster-prone areas in terms of floods and landslides and site-specific disaster response prescriptions are in place for each such location classifying the areas in terms of the anticipated severity as High, Medium and Low. The disaster response plans cover evacuation to safe locations within the landscape before elaborate safety mechanisms could be brought to place.

9. The forest staff have been trained in disaster response and are in close liaison with the District Disaster Management teams for updates on weather, identification of triggers and in setting up mechanisms for achieving the desired level of preparedness. With respect to Forest fire, elaborate preparations as detailed in field-level plans (starting from Blocks to Stations and Ranges) are in place. At the Division and Circle level, preparedness as detailed in the National Action Plan on Forest Fires is at work, once again identifying the vulnerable areas and charting




ways to address the vulnerabilities in the best possible way. Control rooms have been established and a mechanism to ensure smooth flow of information and quick response and feedback system are already operational in the case of addressing the issue of forest fires.

10. Government had taken a considered position to stop further encroachments into the forests by regularizing those occupations prior to 01.01.1977 and to evict post 01.01.1977 encroachments. With regard to encroachments verified to be post 01.01.1977, massive efforts were taken to evict the encroachers. Out of the initially identified encroachments extending over 11920 Ha, evictions have been effected on 6945 Ha, and the present extent under encroachments is 4975.5239 Ha. Of the above, the number of encroachments specific to Wayanad District is 2778, over an area of 936.224 Ha. These encroachments are pending eviction since they are in various stages of litigation. Already 1976 encroachments corresponding to area 373.4491 Ha of forest land have been evicted in Wayanad district since 01.01.1977. Considering the efforts above mentioned, it cannot be conjectured that no action was taken by the Department in removing the encroachments from forest land.

11. Wayanad landslide area located in Punchirimattam forest area in Meppady Range of the South Wayanad forest division is part of Vested Forest Committee item no.22. One encroachment of 0.43 Ha was identified in Punchirimattam Vested Forest area in VFC item no.22, Resurvey No.260. The said encroachment was fully washed away. Another encroachment of 0.12 ha in VFC item no.22, Resurvey no.309 downstream was also fully washed away.

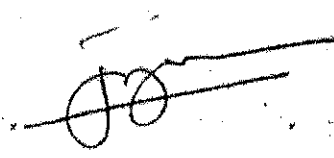
12. The State Governments were directed to constitute State Level Monitoring Committees under the Chairmanship of the Chief Secretaries to meet biannually to take stock of the situation. The same was formed



vide order no. G.O.69/2002/F&WLD dated 08.11.2002 (R4). The Committee was to monitor the progress of removal of encroachments and to facilitate prevention of further encroachments and eviction of existing ones. At the Forest Circle level, Committees under the Chairmanship of Conservator of Forests with District Collectors, Superintendents of Police, and Divisional Forest Officers, as members were ordered to meet every quarter and take steps to assist the Divisional Forest Officers of the Territorial Divisions and the Wildlife Wardens of National Parks and Sanctuaries for the eviction of the encroachments, vide order no. G.O.(MS)15/2003/F&WLD, dated 06.03.2003.

13. On account of evictions and the regularization of occupation of forest land provided for by statute, the encroachments in forest land were brought down from 11920 Ha to 5024.535 Ha by 2021-22, as reported in the Administration Report for the period. During the following years (2022-24), this is further reduced to 4975.5239 Ha, as on 31.03.2024. All encroachments apart from the post 01.01.1977 cases are removed summarily by the Forest Department in accordance with the provisions of Kerala Forest Act, 1961 and in co-ordination with Revenue and Police Departments, as and when reported.

14. As part of efforts to prevent further encroachments, field staff are deployed for the protection of forest areas. The Department has undertaken boundary demarcation and consolidation by constructing permanent cairns and kayyalas and has initiated the process of digitization of forest boundaries in collaboration with the Revenue Department. With regard to boundary consolidation covering a stretch of 16,846 Km, of which 5291.26 Km is of natural boundaries (not requiring demarcation), the length of boundary requiring demarcation is 11,554.74 Km. Of the above, 10,694.74 Km of boundary demarcation is completed till date. The demarcation by construction of permanent cairns in the



remaining 860 Km of boundary is in progress and is being monitored closely. It is proposed to complete the process of boundary demarcation in a year's time thereby bringing clarity on the forest boundaries of the State thus reducing the chances of further encroachments. With regard to digitization of forest boundaries in collaboration with the Revenue Department, already 92 villages have been mapped in the 1st and 2nd phases of the programme and is in progress.

15. It also may be noted that the Wayanad landscape is fragile and the landslide is a result of multiple factors such as the terrain, the preparatory circumstances (previous instances as soil piping) and the trigger which was the high rainfall recorded in the preceding couple of days. It cannot therefore be surmised that the landslide is a result of the encroachments that are identified within the area.

Thus, it is requested that the above report may kindly be accepted.

Dated this the March 2025



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