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Restoration project all set boost biodiversity of Pulicat Lake in Andhra Pradesh

A study conducted by National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) has suggested opening the Raidoruvu mouth, construction of training jetties and dredging of channel in a stretch of 2.8 km towards the lake

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Tirupati MP M. Gurumoorthy taking a boat ride for a study on Pulicat Lake recently. | Photo Credit: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The biodiversity of Pulicat Lake, the second largest brackish water lagoon in India located on the Andhra Pradesh–Tamil Nadu border, is all set to get a boost as the Central and State governments will implement an ecosystem restoration project involving an expenditure of ₹128.80 crore.

The lake spreads over 481 sq.km, encompassing Tada and Sullurpet mandals of Tirupati district (Andhra Pradesh) on the north, and Gummidipoondi and Ponneri taluks of Tiruvallur district (Tamil Nadu) on the south. The waterbody has been shrinking in area and depth due to the accumulation of sand at Raidoruvu (Rayadaruvu) inlet, the northern entry point from the sea. On the south, it opens into 'Pazhaverkadu mouth'.

At present, the lake has an average water spread area of 297 square km, with a depth of just one metre in most parts and this has led to degradation of its wetland ecosystem. The fishermen have been losing their livelihood owing to diminishing catch, silting of navigation channels, pollution and inundation during cyclones. It is also posing a security risk to the ISRO's Satish Dhawan Space Centre located in its vicinity at Sriharikota island (SDSC-SHAR).

A detailed study conducted by the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR), a unit of Ministry of Earth Sciences, saw a solution in opening the Raidoruvu mouth to allow water to flow into the lake. The study recommended construction of training jetties for its stabilisation, besides dredging of channel in a stretch of 2.8 km towards the lake.

Sagarmala project

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways came forward to develop the lake under its flagship Sagarmala project but wanted the State government to contribute. After hectic parleys, the State agreed to share the cost through its Department of Fisheries.

A nursery for fish and prawns, the Pulicat Lake has major fish landing centres. "The project impacts the livelihood of 40,000 fishermen families," Member of Parliament (Tirupati) M. Gurumoorthy told *The Hindu*.

With the increase in the pH value of water and depletion in the fish yield, the fishermen have resorted to selling earthworms to hatcheries, giving a deathblow to the ecosystem, observed Mr. Gurumoorthy, who brought various players to the negotiating table.