

Maharashtra government adds 1,388 ha of mangrove area in Thane as forest land

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The Maharashtra government has notified around 1,388 hectare (ha) of mangrove area in Thane as forest land under section 4 of the Indian Forest Act (IFA), 1927. This has taken the state's total reserved forest area tally to 16,700ha.

In a gazette notification issued on Tuesday, the state revenue and forest department announced that 1,387.39ha of mangroves land across 14 villages in Thane has now been declared as deemed reserved forest area.

"It's positive news for the conservation of mangroves. This notified area is now deemed forest land. Following the legal process, revenue officials will visit these areas, and in time they will be notified as reserved forests," said Virendra Tiwari, additional principal chief conservator of forests and an ex-officio executive director of the state mangrove foundation. The areas notified are from villages in Thane district and taluka.

In another notification, the state has also notified 1,575.16ha of mangrove land along the Maharashtra coast that is likely to be handed over to the forest department for better conservation (under section 20 of IFA, 1927), almost 16 years after the Bombay high court (HC) directed the government to do so. These mangroves are in Raigad, Sindhudurg, Mumbai suburban and Thane districts.

In 2005, in an interim order, the HC had said that all mangrove areas on government land were to be handed over to the forest department. The HC reiterated its order on September 18, 2018. However, while district bodies are yet to hand over 1,592.8ha, state agencies such as the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) have failed to transfer approximately 1,147ha falling under their jurisdiction to the forest department.

In December last year, an environment group issued contempt notices to all Konkan district collectors, the Konkan divisional commissioner and JNPT for failing to hand over mangrove land under their jurisdiction, to the forest department. Last week, Vanashakti, an environmental NGO, filed a petition in the HC seeking immediate transfer of all mangrove lands to the forest department.

Environmentalists, however, were upset that Uran was missing from the list of mangroves to be handed over to the forest department. "The list does not notify the mangroves of Uran and Navi Mumbai, where we have been highlighting the destruction of mangroves through illegal constructions," said Stalin D, director of Vanashakti.

"The reckless construction of roads straight on mangrove and marshy lands resulted in the highway developing huge cracks, which is a big lesson for the project proponents," said BN Kumar, director, NGO NatConnect Foundation.

Tiwari, however, said that discussions were on with government bodies such as Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (Mhada) and City and Industrial Development Corporation (Cidco) for

transfer of ownership of mangrove areas to the forest department. "More such notifications are expected in the coming months," said Tiwari.

State environment minister Aaditya Thackeray, who held a meeting with the forest department on Thursday, tweeted: "I am happy to say that we have so far added 6,500 ha mangrove area to reserved forest land under section 20 of IFA, 1927, in less than a year. By June, we expect that it will increase to 10,000ha."

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news>