

It is easy for a campaigning organisation to confuse the general public by taking advantage of the fact that most of them would not know the details or try to cross check. Having started a campaign that the port is going to be a threat to the turtles, they would want to deny any clarification or explanation that we may give and would like to perpetuate the myths they have created. We shall attempt below to remove some of these.

First, the ground truth. No development can ever claim that it shall not have any impact on environment. One has to find out whether such impact is mitigable or not, and if it is so, undertake the development with safeguards and precautions. This is what sustainable development is all about.

Coming to the campaigners' response point wise ;

1. Location:

If 12 to 15 KM is not too far it is also not too close. And this distance is not only from the nesting beach but from the outer boundary of a large 1400 sq. km marine sanctuary which has a "core" area and a "buffer" area to protect the area of "turtle congregation", which includes mating, nesting etc. from any outside activity as most such activities are banned inside that area. This includes nearly a 70 km beach from north of Paradip to south of Dhamra where no development is allowed. Do we want to ban all development even outside these limits even if it is possible to carry out such developments in a sustainable manner?

The Greenpeace assertion about bio-diversity is based on a rapid survey of doubtful scientific validity, listing animals (frogs, snakes, crabs etc.) which have not been classified as endangered and has no basis or support by any other study. The report itself was mired in controversy as the report published by Greenpeace was different from one available with the university and the university took exception to it. The bio-diversity of Bhitarkanika sanctuary is of course well known. But this sanctuary which includes a national park is again south of river Dhamra and the clearance was given after the considered opinion of the Wildlife Authorities that the port which is on the sea north of river Dhamra is not going to affect the bio-diversity of the sanctuary or the national park

Turtles visit Orissa coast not in small numbers but in hundreds of thousands. Locating a turtle any where off Orissa coast is never a big issue nor does it prove anything. One can find turtles within the port waters of existing busy Paradip port. It is easy to mislead public by saying that a turtle was located near Dhamra port. Turtles co-exist with ports in other parts of the world also. It is a well known fact that thousands of turtles get killed along the Orissa coast for various reasons the chief of which is getting trapped in fishing nets. Port or shipping activity – there

already is a busy port at Paradip which is between two nesting beaches – is not known to be a cause of turtle mortality. Greenpeace sensationalizes the so-called “discovery” of 2000 dead turtles. Figures greater than this are part of official record. As far as the tally of dead turtles in the Greenpeace published NOU report is concerned, the original university report said that these turtles must have been washed ashore by northward wind meaning thereby that they have been killed further south. The Greenpeace report changes these words into saying that most of these must have been killed north of Kanika sands. There is no limit to how campaigners can distort truth to suit their campaign.

2. Port waters and dredging area and turtle presence:

The campaigners are again trying to sensationalize the fact of the presence of a turtle. The Olive Ridley turtle which appears in the “vulnerable” list of IUCN (a notch lower than “endangered”) is not a rare animal that its presence should make news. The same study also located turtle near Paradip port. What is important is whether the port site is one where turtles nest or near where turtles congregate for mating etc. that would be disturbed by the port activity. All available studies show that these activities take place inside the sanctuary limits. (See WII report 2000 http://www.wii.gov.in/publications/researchreports/2000/conseration_oliv_eridley.pdf)

What do the campaigners mean by “the fact that waters off the port site are foraging grounds of the turtle”. Do they have any single study or proof to establish this? How easy it is to make truthful sounding statements to support a campaign the objective of which is the campaign itself.

And what do the campaigners mean by saying that it is a known fact that turtles do not nest in the port area? Do they mean that being or not being a nesting place is of no importance?

The campaigners did in fact try to suggest that no mass nesting in Gahirmatha has taken place since the dredging started, and as if in retaliation of this false campaign, the turtles came in thousands (1.7 lakh) to mass nest at Gahirmatha only two days after the campaigners said it boldly in newspaper advertisements.

3. Impact on Bhitarkanika National Park:

The Bhitarkanika National Park is well south of river Dhamra (the river is more than 1 km wide.) Between the port site and the national park are thickly populated villages, then the river and then more villages. Known for crocodiles and a rich variety of mangroves and other species of flora and fauna it is a separate land mass with river and creek systems and is in no way connected with the port which is on the sea further north of the

mouth of river Dhamra. The port site is surrounded by agricultural fields and populated villages with no forests. The EIA did in fact take into account the bio-diversity of this area and this issue was considered by the Empowered Committee for Environment Clearance who had called for a report from the Chief Wildlife Warden and Director Environment, Orissa.

4. Environmental Impact Assessment :

The campaigners have again resorted to intellectual dishonesty by either not knowing or not disclosing the full facts about the EIA which was supplemented by further reports and documents during the two year process of environmental clearance. No one would ever build a port in a different site from the one for which clearance was obtained. The National Environment Appellate Authority in fact had visited the site. The other numbers and figures are the campaigners' own without reference to all the various documents produced before the Authorities for environmental clearance.

EIA is not the only study which goes into building a port. A four season study of currents, bathymetry and other geomorphologic aspects is undertaken to ensure that the port is designed and constructed in a manner that it causes least disturbances to the natural surroundings. For such disturbance can be harmful to the stability of the channel and the port installation itself.

The environmental clearance very clearly required authorized institutes to be involved during dredging to ensure that it does not adversely affect marine productivity and the port has been doing so. While the Regional Research Laboratory is monitoring the water quality, the National Institute of Oceanography is monitoring the geo morphological aspects.

5. Environment Management:

The campaigners would like one to understand that what they say is correct and everything else, whether it is EIA or EMP is based on invalid facts. The truth is, no port developer would risk its investment before properly studying such aspects as impact on erosion and on shoreline etc., for if at all such impacts are there, the first casualty would be the channel and the land on which the port is developed for those would be the nearest from the area of dredging. The truth is that Dhamra is one of the most natural ports where the jetty and the channel are so designed that they will have least impact on surrounding geomorphology. The channel is along the natural course through which the northern part of the river flushes itself into the sea. In other words, the dredging is merely a deepening of an existing stream. While we are being advised by the IUCN scientists in taking all such measures as would mitigate any possible adverse impact on

marine life, and we are successfully taking those measures as no port developer of the country had ever done in the past, we are also constantly monitoring the impact of dredging by reputed institutions like RRL and NIO

Yes. The campaigners did ask our scientific advisers as to whether there is a need to stop construction and they have received a definite reply that there is no need. If campaigners hide such information, there is nothing one can do about it.

Similarly, the campaigners are misleading the public by calling a study report a guideline (what is mentioned in a study partly funded by WII does not become a MOEF guideline) and observations as recommendations, (the CEC observation has been replied to by the State Government after which no observation on the matter has been received), just to suit their campaign. They should also know that the Regional Office (East) of MoEF is part of the monitoring mechanism who regularly receive our progress reports and periodically inspect the implementation of EMP.

And finally, are we worried about the result of study? Why would we agree to a further study in the first place (not once but thrice), that too after having received all legal clearances, if we were worried about the result.