

## Scientists' Statement Opposing Dhamra Port Project

Source - Oceans and communities -

[http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1541/t/4058/petition.jsp?petition\\_KEY=835](http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1541/t/4058/petition.jsp?petition_KEY=835)

The Orissa state government in India is permitting construction of a massive deep-water industrial port less than 15 kilometers from one of the world's most important Olive Ridley sea turtle nesting beaches. If completed, the Dhamra port will be one of the largest in South Asia, with 19-kilometer channels dredged deep and wide enough to accommodate Panamax and Capesize vessels.

The original environmental assessment failed to adequately address the impacts on the Olive Ridelies suggesting that there would be no impact from the massive dredging and acknowledged light pollution that will come from the project. Recent studies have also linked ports to increase human mortality rates due to the high levels of pollution. Environmental organizations and local fishermen's unions are asking the international community to help them stop construction of the Dhamra port at this location where its impacts on the sea turtles could spell extinction and its impacts on local fishermen could spell ruin.

For more background on this issue, see the websites of:

- i. Operation Kachhapa ([www.wpsi-india/projects/operation\\_kachhapa.php](http://www.wpsi-india/projects/operation_kachhapa.php))
- ii. Greenpeace India ([www.greenpeace.org/turtles](http://www.greenpeace.org/turtles))
- iii. Sanctuary Asia  
([www.sanctuaryasia.com/takeaction/detailcampaign.php?cid=127](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com/takeaction/detailcampaign.php?cid=127))
- iv. Mangrove Action Project ([www.mangroveactionproject.org/news/action-alerts/stop-port-construction-save-ridley-turtles-sept-oct-2007](http://www.mangroveactionproject.org/news/action-alerts/stop-port-construction-save-ridley-turtles-sept-oct-2007))
- v. Global Response ([www.globalresponse.org](http://www.globalresponse.org))
- vi. The Wild Foundation ([www.wild.org](http://www.wild.org))

### **Get Involved**

We are asking scientists to add their name to a statement opposing the Dhamra port project, calling for a new environmental assessment, and urging the relocation of the port from sensitive and biologically critical sea turtle nesting habitat. **Please add your name to the statement below.**

### **PETITION**

An International Call by Leading Scientists to Halt the Dhamra Deepwater Port Project in Orissa, India  
November 2007

Addressed to:

Mr. Ratan Tata, Chairman, Tata Sons  
Shri. Naveen Patnaik, Chief Minister, Orissa, India  
Ms. Julia Marton-LeFevre, Director General, IUCN

As scientists concerned about the health of our oceans worldwide, we have joined together in support of sustainable development policies that protect the livelihoods of artisanal and small-scale fishers, endangered marine species, and commercial and subsistence fish populations.

We are making this statement to express our concern over the proposed Dhamra port project in Orissa, India, funded and managed by Tata Steel in collaboration with Larsen & Toubro. It will have serious environmental, social and economic impacts. The Dhamra port will be one of South Asia's largest all-weather deepwater ports, with 13 berths projected to handle 80 million tons of cargo annually, comprising mainly coking coal for steel production and iron ore exports. The construction of the port facility and a 19 km entrance approach to deepwater will require 60 million cubic meters of dredging initially, with more on for annual maintenance. In addition to the direct impacts of the port, ancillary settlements and industries will have catastrophic effects on sea turtles, since the amount and intensity of lighting would disorient nesting sea turtles and hatchlings.

Despite the project first being proposed over ten years ago, to date no comprehensive, scientifically competent Environment Impact Assessment has been conducted. The only EIA conducted in 1997 by Kirloskar Consultants is widely acknowledged to have major scientific flaws and lacunae, including lack of baseline scientific data, particularly on the biodiversity values of the area, no oil spill response plan, an overall failure to identify fully the potential ecological impacts and a failure to consider potential extreme weather events and impacts of climate change.

The present site is not suitable for port construction since it has the potential to seriously impact the rich marine environment of the region, particularly the endangered populations of the olive ridley sea turtles, and coastal fishing communities. The port site, where construction is now commencing, is in a known turtle habitat. Various studies have also recorded evidence of turtle presence in the offshore waters. In addition, rare species of reptiles and amphibians have been recorded on the port site itself.

#### Impacts on Sea Turtles

The world famous Gahirmatha nesting site of the olive ridley sea is just 15 km from the proposed port. Every year, approximately 200,000 olive ridley sea turtles [a protected species under Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1991, and an endangered species according to the IUCN] nest on the Nasi islands and the coastline of Kendrapara district. In 1997, these nesting beaches and habitats were granted legal protection as part of the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in 1997. The close proximity of the port site poses a clear and significant risk to the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary and the surrounding turtle nesting and breeding habitats. Risks of damage come from, but are not limited to, dredging, light and chemical pollution, oil spills, and shipping traffic.

#### Impacts on Fishing Communities

Further, the waters off the Dhamra port site are an important fishing ground for the local fishing communities of Dhamra, Talchua, Chandnipal and other nearby areas. The construction of a mega port will definitely impact access to traditional fishing grounds. There is also the possibility that frequent dredging, shipping traffic, and increasing levels of pollution, will impact fish productivity, and therefore local food supply.

#### Impacts on Biological Diversity

The project site is just 5 kilometres from the Bhitarkanika Sanctuary and National Park and less than 15 from the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. These three critical sites and

their surrounding areas abound in coastal and marine biodiversity -- several species of mangroves, the horseshoe crab, olive ridley sea turtles, salt-water crocodiles, monitor lizards, dolphins, porpoises, shore birds etc. The Bhitarkanika forest is a Ramsar site with a high diversity of mangrove species (>60). These mangrove forests are the second largest in India. The estuarine region of Dhamra River and Maipura River are rich in marine organisms as a result of these significant protected areas.

The first record of the frog *Fejervarya cancrivora*, on the Indian mainland comes from the proposed Dhamra port site. It also has the second record on the Indian mainland, after the Sundarbans, of the mangrove snake *Fordonia leucobalia*.

Recognizing that the proposed Dhamra port project poses significant threats to sea turtles, the marine environment, and coastal communities; and recognising that there has been no comprehensive, scientific impact assessment of the port,

We the undersigned:

1. Call on the State of Orissa to immediately require a new comprehensive and independent Environmental Impact Assessment that recognizes and properly assesses the impact of the port project on the local ecology including such species as the olive ridley sea turtle; and in the interim, halt all ongoing and planned construction work until such time that the study is complete.
2. Protect one of the world's largest sea turtle mass nesting site by keeping the nearby areas free from any kind of developmental activity;
3. Urge Tata Steel and Larsen & Toubro to consider relocating the port to a less ecologically sensitive site, away from turtle nesting and foraging grounds; and comply with their respective commitments to the various international agreements to which they are signatories, such as the Global Compact.
4. Urge IUCN not to accept the port as a fait accompli, and to stop preparation of the mitigation plan without first carrying out an environmental impact assessment study.
5. Furthermore call on the IUCN to uphold the precautionary principle and not to accept unproven mitigation measures that may threaten a major population of an endangered species.

Sincerely,

1. Gautam Salhotra - IIT Bombay, India.
2. Chaitanya Sakhalkar - Dr. D.Y.Patil Institute of Biotechnology and Bioinformatics, India
3. Dr. Cynthia Lagoux - Wildlife Conservation Society and Member - Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) - IUCN SSC.
4. Sagarmoy Dutta - IIT Kanpur, India.
5. Ingrid Knapp, Jennifer Moore, Henry Kresko, Philipp Neubauer, Katherine Ross - Victoria University of Wellington.
6. Dr. Ramani Jayewardane - Indian Ocean Marine Affairs Co-Operation.
7. Jeff D Miller, Marine Turtle Specialist Group Member (MTSG), IUCN.
8. Agastya Chopra - One Earth Conservation.
9. Sruti Kumar - Wildlife Institute of India.
10. Dr. Cathi Campbell - Wildlife Conservation Society
11. Carl Llyod - Oceans Spirit Inc.

12. Dr. Philippe Maraval - Regional Directorate of Environment - In charge of Mission Sea Turtles, Whales and Sustainable Development, Marine Turtles Network of the French West Indies.
13. Mohammed Saad, Marine Science and Resources Research Centre, Yemen.
14. Chris Dews, Greenheart - Ibiza
15. Ricardo Hernandez - National University of Costa Rica.
16. Dr. Georg Heiss, Coordinator of Europe - Reef Check.
17. Dr. Dubief Lionel, SEPANMAR, Société d'Etude
18. Dr. Georgina Spyres, Hellenic Centre for Marine Research, Netherlands.
19. Gargi Roy, Environmental Protection Agency, Guyana
20. Jemma, Cornwall Sustainable Tourism Project (COAST), Cornwall
21. Dr. Julia Horrocks, Director, Barbados Sea Turtle Project, Member - MTSG.
22. Eric Delcroix, Association Kap Natirel, Coordinator of Sea Turtle Conservation Project, Guadeloupe
23. Dr. Paul Hoetjes, Department of Environment and Member of the MTSG - IUCN ; Department of Environment & Nature - Ministry of Health & Social Development, Netherlands.
24. Debra Sherman, Executive Director, Save the Turtles Inc.
25. Dimitris Margaritoulis, ARCHELON Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, Ex-President of the International Sea Turtle Society and MTSG Member of the MTSG - IUCN.
26. Emily Coffey, Centre for Environment - University of Oxford, Oxford.
27. Dr. Argelis Ruiz, WIDECAST-PANAMA & Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute
28. Jose Uretega, Red Nacional para la Conservacion de tortugas Marinas de Nicaragua
29. Dr. Helen Martins, University of Azores & Member of the MTSG - IUCN, Portugal.
30. Dr. Filipa Filipe, Institute of Biology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
31. Julia Santana Garcon, CRAM
32. Dr. Bruno Pinto, New University of Lisbon, Portugal
33. Michelle Kalamandeen, Scientific Officer - Centre for the Study of Biological Diversity, University of Guyana, Project Coordinator of Guyana Marine Turtles Conservation Society (Sea Turtle Project), Guyana.
34. Dr. Gale Bishop, Director, St. Catherines Island Sea Turtle Conservation Program
35. Yolanda Leon, INTEC University and Member of the MTSG - IUCN
36. Zahirul Islam, Director - Marinelife Alliance and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC, Bangladesh
37. Tanya Clovis, Vice-President, SOS Tobago
38. Dr. Ajith Kumar, Deputy Director - Centre for Wildlife Studies, India
39. Dr. Ullas Karanth, Director - Wildlife Conservation Society, India
40. Rebecca Dolson, University of Guelph, Canada.
41. Dr. Kelly Stewart, Duke Marine Laboratories - Centre for Marine Conservation, USA.
42. Dr. Reisa Latorra, President - Turtle Foundation, USA
43. Sara Maxwell, Department of Ocean Sciences - University of California Santa Cruz, USA.
44. Dr. Frank Zindel, Chairman - Turtle Foundation (Switzerland)
45. Stephany Arroyo, Co-Director, Nesting Beach Projects, PRETOMA, Costa Rica.
46. Dr. Luisa Rodrigues - ICNB and Member of Advisory Committee to Government of Portugal on the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)
47. Sara Martins, Environmental Studies Association of Canada.
48. Dr. Dean Bagely - Marine Turtle Research, University of Central Florida, USA.
49. Dr. Karen Arthur - Smithsonian Institution, Florida, USA.
50. Dr. Shaya Honarvar - Drexel University, USA
51. Dr. Karen L Eckert - Executive Director, Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network, Duke University, USA and Member of the MTSG - IUCN.
52. Marina Sequeria, Institute for Nature Conservation, Portugal.
53. Stephanie Sunderman, University of Nevada
54. Mohammed Fazlul Haque, Coastal and Wetland Biodiversity Management (CWBMP), Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Bangladesh.

55. David Robinson, Marine Biologist - National Marine Aquarium, USA.
56. Dr. Nuno de Santos Loureiro - Professor of Natural Resources Engineering, University of Algrave, Portugal.
57. Marny Bonner, Director - Australian Seabird Rescue : Marine Turtle Division,
58. Dr. Kirsten Dahlen - Marine Biologist, National Park Service, USA.
59. Kathy Southwell, Australian Seabird Rescue.
60. Dr. Mohammed Hannan, Chairman - Save the Nature, Bangladesh.
61. Dr. Bivash Pandav, Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC, India.
62. Romulus Whitaker, Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC, India.
63. Rebecca Bell, Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
64. Marydele Donnelly, Director - International Policy of the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC); Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
65. Dr. Jack Frazier, Conservation and Research Centre - Smithsonian Institution and member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
66. Jessica Frazier, Ministry of Environment, USA
67. Dr. James Spotila, Professor - Drexel University, USA and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
68. Dr. Roldan Valverde, Asst Professor of Biology: Southeastern Louisiana University, USA and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
69. Dr. G.N. Vankhede, Head of the Department - Zoology, Amravati University, India.
70. Kishor Rithe, President, Satpuda Foundation, India.
71. Soujanya Shrivastava, Bombay Natural History Society, India.
72. Alec Hutchinson, Program Director, PRETOMA, Costa Rica and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
73. Dr. Onno Gross, First President - DEEPWAVE, Germany.
74. Dr. Meghna Krishnadas, Growing Wild, India.
75. Jack Woody, US Fish and Wildlife Service, USA and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
76. Nikhil Whitaker, Madras Crocodile Bank Trust - Centre for Herpetology, India.
77. Lily Venizelos, Founder and President - Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles, Greece.
78. Vivek Kulkarni, Mangrove Wetland Centre, India.
79. Yaniv Levy, Israeli Sea Turtle Rescue Centre - Nature Parks & Authority and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
80. Todd Steiner, Founder and President of the Turtle Island Restoration Project, USA and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
81. Wesley Sunderraj, Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE) and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
82. Edward Aruna, Conservation Society of Sierra Leone and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
83. Dr. Yakup Kaska, Sea Turtle Research Unit - Pamukkale University, Turkey.
84. Ananda Kumar Mavatur, Nature Conservation Foundation, India.
85. Dr. Basudev Tripathy, Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
86. Dr. Priyadarsanan Dharma Rajan, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, India.
87. Varad Giri, Bombay Natural History Society, India.
88. Dr. Ronald Engel, Senior Research Associate - Centre for Humans and Nature, USA.
89. Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh, Conservation Biologist, India.
90. Ashish Kothari, Kalpavriksh, Co-Chair, IUCN Theme on Indigenous Communities, India.
91. Dr. Asad Rahmani, Conservation Researcher, India
92. Fahmeeda Hanfee, WWF - India.
93. Aarthi Sridhar, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, India.
94. Dr. Alan Rabinowitz, Director - Science and Exploration, Wildlife Conservation Society, USA
95. Dr. Vandana Shiva, Navdanya
96. Gonzalo Griebenow, Environmental Economist - World Bank.

97. Randall Arauz, President - PRETOMA, Central American Director - Sea Turtle Restoration Project and Member of the MTSG - IUCN SSC.
98. Peter Jackson, Ex-Chair Cat Specialist group of the IUCN - SSC.
99. Dr. Tuhin Ghosh, School of Oceanographic Studies, Jadavpur University, India.
100. Dr. Francois Catzeflis, Faculty of Sciences, University of Montpellier.

*Note: The above signatories are part of over 200 scientists and academics who have signed on.*

#### **References on Dhamra port issue:**

1. Resolution of the 20th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in 2000, asking that the Indian government requesting that the Government of India to review the Dhamra port project, subject the proposal to objective Environmental Impact Assessment and have the proposal passed through the proper channels of the Ministry of Environment and Forests; and that the alternative sites for port construction are objectively considered and evaluated.  
<http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn/archives/mtn88/mtn88p22.shtml>
2. Scientific critique of the EIA for the Dhamra port by Dr. David Santillo and Dr. Paul Johnston, Exeter University, UK  
<http://www.greenpeace.org/india/press/reports/critique-of-the-environmental>
3. Biodiversity Assessment of the Dhamra Port Site by Dr. S.K. Dutta  
<http://www.greenpeace.org/india/press/reports/greenpeace-biodiversity>
4. Cyber campaign hosted by Global Response, Colorado, USA, acting on behalf of Orissa Traditional Fishworkers' Union  
<http://www.globalresponse.org/>
5. Steel firm's plan for mega port 'threatens rare Indian turtles', August 2, 2007, The Independent, London, UK  
<http://environment.independent.co.uk/nature/article2826218.ece>
6. 'No Port for Turtles', Sanctuary Asia, August 2007  
<http://www.sanctuaryasia.com/sanctmagazine/archivedetail.php?id=841>
7. 'India - Tata in troubled waters', Ethical Corporation, November 2007, London, UK  
<http://www.ethicalcorp.com/content.asp?ContentID=5515>