

Topic of the week for discussion: 2<sup>nd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> March 2017

## Topic: Smoke on the Water

The extraordinary sight of a lake in Bengaluru on fire, with a massive plume of smoke that could be seen from afar, is a warning sign that **urban environments are crashing** under the weight of official indifference. If **wetlands are the kidneys of the cities**, as scientists like to describe them, Karnataka's capital city has entered a phase of **chronic failure**. No longer the city of lakes and famed gardens, it has lost an **estimated 79% of water bodies and 80% of its tree cover** from the baseline year of 1973. Successive governments in the State have ignored the rampant encroachment of lake beds and catchment areas for **commercial exploitation, and the pollution caused by sewage, industrial effluents and garbage**, which contributed to the blaze on **Bellandur lake**.

The neglect is deliberate, since some of the finest urban ecologists in the city have been warning that government inaction is turning Bengaluru into an **unliveable mess**. It is time the State government took note of the several expert recommendations that have been made, including those of the **Centre for Ecological Sciences of the Indian Institute of Science**. The priority, clearly, is to **end pollution outfalls into the water bodies**, which will help revive them to an acceptable state of health. Identifying all surviving wetlands and demarcating them using digital and physical mapping will help communities monitor encroachments, while **removal of land-grabbers and restoration of interconnecting channels** is crucial to avoid future flooding events.

### Reasons for fire:

Locals alleged that **debris dumped into the lake and the lakes's bank** along with garbage was **set ablaze illegally** by miscreants that led to the massive fire. The toxic foams formed on the surface of the lake as a result of **heavy pollution fuelled the flames** that raged on for hours with no remedies to contain it. The Bellandur Lake has been **dying a slow death** with **unchecked chemical waste as well as pollutants** being dumped into the water body. Residents allege that the government and civic agencies have done nothing but lip service to clean up the lake and rejuvenate it. Citizens took to social media to put out videos and pictures of the lake on fire in a bid to convey their frustration with the government's inaction. The lake is not only heavily polluted but fires that break out now and then are a **major health concern** for those living in the vicinity. The fact that a **water body caught fire only goes on to expose the pollution levels in the lake**.

### Collapse of Environmental Management and Future Actions:

Loss of natural wetlands is an ongoing catastrophe in India. A decade ago, when the **Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History released a conservation atlas** for all States using space applications, it reported the tragic fact that **38% of wetlands had already been lost** nationally; and shockingly, in some districts only **12% survived**. The Centre has since issued rules for conservation and management, and chosen **115 water bodies in 24 States** for protection support, but this is obviously too little.

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Moreover, research studies show that the concentration of heavy metals in such sites is leading to bioaccumulation, thus entering the plants and animals that ultimately form part of people's food. It should worry not just Bengaluru's residents, for instance, that **soil scientists have found higher levels of cadmium in green vegetables grown using water from Bellandur**. More broadly, the collapse of environmental management because of multiple, disjointed agencies achieving little collectively and legal protections remaining unimplemented pose a **serious threat to public health**. Every city needs a **single lake protection authority**. India's worsening air quality is now well documented, and most of its wetlands are severely polluted.

Citizens must assert themselves to stop this **perilous course**.

**Read further:**

[http://mashable.com/2017/02/17/bangalore-lake-froth-smoke-fire-india/#SO\\_qd3M1VSqD](http://mashable.com/2017/02/17/bangalore-lake-froth-smoke-fire-india/#SO_qd3M1VSqD)

<http://www.thebetterindia.com/87836/bellandur-lake-bengaluru-water-pollution-innovative-solutions/>

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/ground-grass-catches-fire-near-bellandur-lake/articleshow/57200768.cms>

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/fire-on-bellandur-lake/article7215310.ece>