

**BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI**

O.A. No. 555/2024

IN THE MATTER OF:

“News item titled “India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch” appearing in Indian Express date 13.04.2024”

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THROUGH COUNSEL



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PLACE: NEW DELHI

DATE: 15/09/2025

BEFORE THE HON'BLE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI

RESPONSE AFFIDAVIT

(On behalf of Respondent No.23 i.e. State of Odisha through Secretary of the Department of Forest, Environmental & Climate Change, Kharavel Bhavan Bhubaneshwar- 751001, Odisha)

(In Compliance to the Hon'ble Tribunal's Orders dated 18.11.2024 and 07.08.2025)

IN

ORIGINAL APPLICATION No. 555 OF 2024

IN THE MATTER OF (Suo-Moto):

News item titled 'India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch' appearing in the Indian Express date 13.04.2024

Versus

Central Pollution Control Board & Ors.

.... Respondents

Affidavit of Mr Suresh Pant (Male), aged 59 years, S/o Late Gokula Nand Pant, working as Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF, having office at ^{AAANYA} Kharavel Bhawan, Odisha, Bhubaneshwar, Dist- Khodra, PIN- 751023.

MANOJ KUMAR PANDA
NOTARY, BHUBANESWAR
GOVT. OF ODISHA (INDIA)
Regd. No.-ON-52-2089

[Signature]
(Deponent)
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
Head of Forests
Odisha, Bhubaneswar

AFFIDAVIT OF MR. SURESH PANT (PRINCIPAL CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS & HoFF) IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE HON'BLE TRIBUNAL'S ORDERS DATED 18.11.2024 AND 07.08.2025



9.25

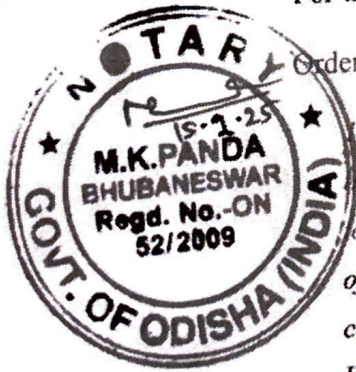


9.25

MANOJ KUMAR PANDA
NOTARY, BHUBANESWAR
GOVT. OF ODISHA (INDIA)
Regd. No.-ON-52-2009

I, Mr Suresh Pant aged 59 years, S/o Late Gokula Nand Pant working as Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF, having office at ~~Kharavel~~ ^{ARANYA} Bhawan, Odisha, Bhubaneshwar, Dist- Khorda, PIN- 751023, do hereby solemnly affirm and state as under:

1. That I am currently posted as Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF (Odisha) and as such am fully conversant with the facts of the case and competent to swear this affidavit on behalf of Secretary of the Department of Forest, Environment & Climate Change, Regional office, ~~Kharavel~~ ^{ARANYA} Bhawan Bhubaneswar -751001 Odisha
2. That this Hon'ble Tribunal has registered the present application by taking *suo-moto* cognizance on the basis of a news item titled 'India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch' published in the Indian Express on 13.04.2024.
3. During the course of the hearings on 18.11.2024, this Hon'ble Tribunal was pleased to issue certain directions to several States, impleading them as Respondents in the present matter. With respect to the State of Odisha, it has been arrayed as Respondent No. 23. For the kind perusal of this Hon'ble Tribunal, the relevant directions contained in the Order dated 18.11.2024 are reproduced below.



4. Having also considered the issue that loss of trees is Pan India and therefore individual States and Union Territories should also submit their reports with regard to such loss of trees and the reason therefore addressing relevant issues i.e. status of forest as on date, factor responsible for loss and action taken report for conservation and management of forest, we accordingly implead all States and Union Territories as respondent 5 to 40 through Secretary, Environment, Forest and Climate Change:-

19. Respondent 23 - State of Odisha through Secretary of the Department of Forest, Environment & Climate Change, Regional office, Kharavel Bhawan Bhubaneswar -751001 Odisha

4. It is submitted that the present application has been registered on the basis of an article published in The Indian Express on 13.04.2024, which, in turn, was based on a report


Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
Head of Forest Force

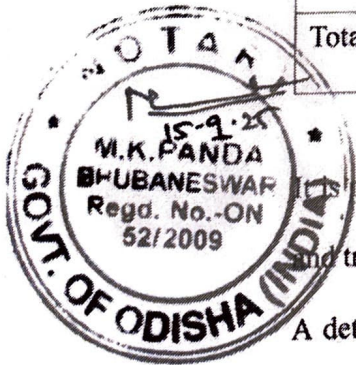
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and data released by the US-based online platform "Global Forest Watch." It is pertinent to note that the said report contains details pertaining to several States of India, including the State of Odisha.

FOREST AND TREE COVER DATA CONCERNING THE STATE OF ODISHA:

5. It is respectfully submitted that the Forest Survey of India conducts biennial assessments of forest and tree cover at the national level, the results of which are published in the **India State of Forest Report ("ISFR")**. A comparative analysis of the forest and tree cover data for the State of Odisha, as reported in ISFR 2001 and ISFR 2023, is provided below:

Year	Forest Cover (In Sq Km)	Tree Cover (In Sq Km)	Total Cover (In Sq Km)
IFSR 2001	48838	4364	53202
IFSR 2023	52433.56	6163.45	58597.01
Total Increase in Cover- 5395.01			

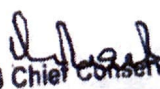


It is pertinent to note that an analysis of the data indicates a notable increase in forest and tree cover in the State between 2001 and 2023.

A detailed table containing the data published in the **India State of Forest Report** biennial reports since 2001 is annexed hereto as **ANNEXURE-1**.

FOREST MANAGEMENT MEASURES TAKEN IN THE STATE OF ODISHA:

6. With respect to Forest Management in the State of Odisha, it is respectfully submitted that the forest management is carried out in accordance with detailed Working Plans approved by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change ("**MoEF&CC**"),


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Odisha, Bhubaneswar

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Government of India. These ten-year plans outline sustainable forest management practices based on scientific principles and are designed to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives.

7. It is respectfully submitted that, in terms of rules and legislation, the Government of Odisha has enacted several measures to address and combat the threat of deforestation.

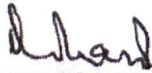
These include:

- *The Orissa Forest Act, 1972;*
- *The Odisha Timber and Other Forest Produce Transit Rules, 1980;*
- *The Odisha Saw Mill and Saw Pits (Control) Act, 1991 and*
- *The Odisha Saw Mill and Saw Pits (Control) Rules, 1993.*

8. It is of utmost importance to highlight that the State of Odisha has a long history of local communities actively protecting and managing forests. In this regard, it is noted that the State Forest Department collaborates closely with local communities for the purposes of afforestation and sustainable forest management.



It is to be noted that Joint Forest Management ("JFM") was formalized in the 1990s and the same has since evolved into a more transformative model of governance and forest management. As of 2024, over 16,194 Vana Sanrakshana Samitis ("VSS") which function as Village Forest Protection Committees, and include amongst others members of forest-dependent communities and individuals from the villages where they are active) and 590 Environment Development Committees ("EDCs") (which function as community-based groups involving local villagers that play a crucial role in environmental conservation) are collectively safeguarding more than 13,95,836 hectares of forest area in the State. This demonstrates that the local population, in

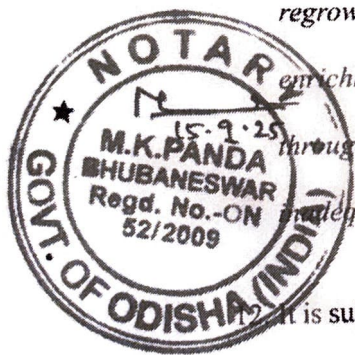

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collaboration with the State Government, plays a pivotal role in afforestation and sustainable forest management.

10. To combat seasonal forest fires, the Forest Department adopts a multi-pronged strategy. It maintains fire lines, engages local villagers in fire-fighting squads during high-risk seasons, and operates a 24/7 control room to ensure early detection and swift action. Additionally, the State has incorporated modern technology, including an AI-based forest fire detection system and real-time alerts with geo-coordinates provided by the Forest Survey of India ("FSI"), to facilitate rapid and effective responses.

11. With respect to afforestation and regeneration, the Government of Odisha has undertaken several initiatives, including **regeneration of degraded bamboo forests, creation of aided natural regeneration and artificial regeneration areas** (*Aided Natural Regeneration refers to assisting and protecting a forest's existing natural regrowth by deploying measures such as weed control, grazing prevention, and limited enrichment planting. Artificial Regeneration involves actively establishing forest cover through planting or direct seeding in areas where natural regeneration is absent or inadequate*), **block plantations on barren hills, and avenue plantations.**



It is submitted that afforestation programmes are also implemented by the Government of Odisha under various schemes such as **GIM, GMM, IGC, DMF, MGNREGS, NBM, OBDD, NAP, CA, SDMF, OFSDP, and CAMPA (Afforestation).**

A table evidencing the positive outcomes of the measures undertaken by the State Government in relation to forest management is annexed hereto and marked as **ANNEXURE-2.**

13. The Government of Odisha employs several management strategies to support the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities through the sustainable use of forest

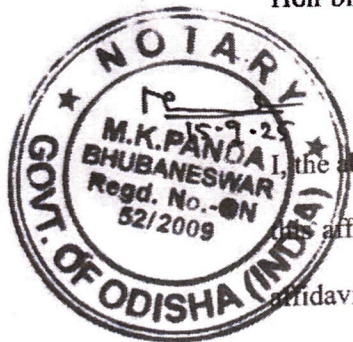

 Principal Chief Conservator of Forests

~~MANOJ KUMAR PANDA~~
NOTARY, BHUBANESWAR
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products. Under these strategies, the Odisha Forest Development Corporation ("OFDC") harvests and sells forest products to generate income for local populations, while the Odisha Forestry Sector Development Project ("OFSDP") implements a range of schemes to further enhance the livelihoods of forest-fringe villagers.

14. It is submitted that the Forest Department leverages technology for enhanced administration and monitoring, including the use of drones and satellite systems to oversee forests and wildlife.

15. That the deponent undertakes to comply with further directions, to be passed by this Hon'ble Tribunal in the present matter.




I, the above-named deponent, do hereby verify that contents of Para Nos. 1 of this affidavit are true to my personal knowledge, those of Para Nos. 2-14 of this affidavit are based on records, those of Para Nos. — of this affidavit are as per the legal advice received and those of Para Nos. — of this affidavit are as per the information received which all I believe are true. That no part of this affidavit is false and no material has been concealed.

I,

Tusar Ray

Dy. CF (P&SM) Utilisation, do hereby identify the deponent who has produced the records of the case before me and I am satisfied that he is same persona as alleged.


 DEPONENT
 Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
 Head of Forest Force
 Odisha, Bhubaneswar


 IDENTIFIER
 Dy. CF (P&SM) (Utilisation)
 O/o PCCF & HoFF, Odisha
 Bhubaneswar

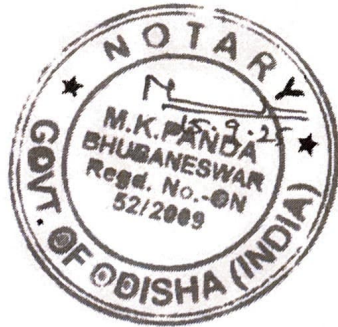
~~MANOJ KUMAR PANDA~~
NOTARY, BHUBANESWAR
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Regd. No.-ON-52-2009

Solemnly affirmed before me today, the 15th day of September, 2025 at 5 P.Mam/pm
by the deponent who has been identified by the aforesaid person.

I have satisfied myself by examining the deponent that he has understood the contents
of this affidavit, which have been read over and explained to him.

OATH COMMISSIONER/NOTARY

~~MANOJ KUMAR PANDA~~
NOTARY, BHUBANESWAR
GOVT. OF ODISHA (INDIA)
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FOREST AND TREE COVER DATA FROM 2001 to 2023 AS PER ISFR, REPORT			
Year	Forest Cover (in Sq Km)	Tree Cover (in Sq km)	Total Forest and Tree Cover (in Sq Km)
ISFR 2001	48838	4364	53202
ISFR 2003	48366	6381	54747
ISFR 2005	48374	4589	52963
IFSR 2009	48855	4435	53290
ISFR 2011	48903	4301	53204
ISFR 2013	50347	4013	54360
ISFR 2015	50354	3986	54340
ISFR 2017	51345	3993	55338
ISFR 2019	51618.51	4648	56266.51
ISFR 2021	52156	5004	57160
ISFR 2023	52433.56	6163.45	58597.01
Change of Forest & Tree Cover from 2001 to 2023			5395.01

(T. K. Roy)
Dy. CF (P&M) (Utilisation)
O/o PCCF & HoFF, Odisha
Bhubaneswar



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YEAR WISE AFFORESTATION ACTIVITIES TAKEN UP UNDER DIFFERENT SCHEMES							
Year	AR in ha	ANR with Gap Pltn in ha	ANR without Gap Pltn in ha	Total in ha	Avenue Pltn in RKM	Seedlings planted in lakh	Seedlings distributed in lakh
1999-2000 to 2004-05		496132		496132	-	835.00	
2005-06		9639		9639		275.00	
2006-07		14229		14229		390.00	
2007-08		62614		62614	-	305.90	39.00
2008-09	21118	76510	1110	98738	42	445.48	-
2009-10	18070	40757	33757	92584	133	415.35	10.00
2010-11	70842	60084	102519	233445	241	1086.10	128.34
2011-12	22950	10291	148946	182187	769	358.92	195.92
2012-13	18603	20230	68454	107287	3107	321.66	211.92
2013-14	25086	38050	54532	117668	4506	467.67	304.14
2014-15	24600	60253	114038	198891	4755	692.67	553.90
2015-16	16576	98540	241975	357091	4607	487.98	460.96
2016-17	15322	128009	258121	401452	5838	499.79	376.57
2017-18	5776	20367	356221	382364	3235	166.86	145.14
2018-19	6224	108747	133561	248532	3686	338.74	142.46
2019-20	13055	55303	71698	140056	3558	339.26	212.48
2020-21	12486	94837	0	107323	4165	392.47	465.77
2021-22	11225	99143	0	110368	4617	382.91	230.46
2022-23	11856.3	76341.67	0	88197.97	4069.3	351.59	211.74
2023-24	5877.49	37513.6	-	43391.09	3111.87	254.42	408.57
2024-25	4073.68	26676.66	170.8	30921	2003.7	197.78	251.07
Total	303741	1051653.37	1585102.9	3523111.27	52442.8	9005.554	4348.44

(T. S. Ray)
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