

In victory to GF, NGT approves 46.11 sq km as private forest

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Tribunal refuses to accept D'Souza Committee report; Takes into consideration Goa Foundation plea to approve 46.11 sq km as final area of private forest



PANJIM: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has approved 46.11 sq km as the final area of private forest in the State while turning down the Goa government appointed committee's report on private forests, as it delivered a 24-page judgment on a petition filed by Goa Foundation.

The petition was filed for finalisation of the reports of the Sawant and Karapurkar (S&K) Committees in connection with identification of private forests in the State.

The S&K reports, identifying forests on private lands, including comunidades, were completed by 2002 and submitted to the Goa government, following a direction given by the Supreme Court of India on December 12, 1996. Both committees identified a total of 67.12 sq km of private forests in the State.

As per information shared with the media by Goa Foundation, in 2003, the NGO moved a petition before the High Court of Bombay at Goa for demarcation of these forests on the ground, since some of the survey numbers were only partly having forest as per the reports. Pursuant to this petition, the Forest Department undertook physical inspection and demarcation of the identified forest patches. However, its demarcation report produced in 2008 reduced the private forests identified by the S&K reports to 41.20 sq km. Goa Foundation challenged this reduction of the private forest area via a writ petition, which the high court transferred to the NGT in 2013.

In 2016, the NGT directed setting up of a review committee that would survey the disputed areas and submit a report. This committee, headed by IFS Officer Deepshikha Sharma was set up only in 2018, and examined the S&K reports. The committee identified, besides the 41.20 sq km demarcated by the Forest Department, an additional area of 4.91 sq km. Thus the forest area stood at 46.11 sq km.

“The Sharma Committee submitted its report on June 21, 2019. Goa government did not accept it and instead appointed one more committee headed by Anthony D’Souza, Joint Secretary, Revenue. The D’Souza Committee was directed to review the work of the Sharma Committee. Later it was asked to review only the 4.91 sq km additional forest identified by the Sharma Committee,” a statement issued by Alvares stated.

“The NGT had directed the final forest report to be deposited with it by July 1, 2019. However, because of the appointment of the D’Souza Committee, the Goa government was forced to pay Rs 1 crore performance guarantee, Rs 50 lakh as penalty, and Rs 61 lakh additional fines at Rs 10,000 per day (for every day of delay in filing the final report). The D’Souza Committee excluded only 1.04 sq km from the Sharma Committee report of 4.91 sq km additional area,” it added.

The NGT judgment pronounced on Tuesday refused to accept the D’Souza Committee report while taking into consideration Goa Foundation’s plea to approve the area of 46.11 sq km as the final area of private forest as per the S&K reports.

The Goa Foundation pursued these forestry cases from 1999 till 2020, a total of 21 years.

Source: <https://www.heraldgoa.in/Goa/In-victory-to-GF-NGT-approves-4611-sq-km-as-private-forest/164411>