

## JNPT scraps mangrove park proposal in Uran, to hand over land to forest department

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The Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), the largest port container terminal in the country, has scrapped plans to develop a 200-hectare mangrove park on its property at Uran's Belpada wetland, reveals the responses to a Right-to-Information (RTI) request by Navi Mumbai-based NGO Nat Connect Foundation. The mangroves will now have to be handed over to the forest department for safekeeping as per orders of the Bombay high court (HC), officials said.

The development of a mangrove park at Uran was first suggested by the State Wetland and Mangrove Grievance Redressal Committee, appointed by the Bombay HC, in January 2019. After consultations with the state forest department's mangrove cell, JNPT roped in the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM) to conduct a feasibility study for the project, which was planned to be developed in two phases.

The first phase of the facility (similar to one being developed in Gorai by the forest department) was to be ready by July this year at a cost of ₹5 crore under JNPT's Port Planning & Development (PPD) department's 'Green Port' initiative. It was proposed to protect two dense mangrove patches in the area, and would also have visiting galleries, mangrove walkthroughs (boardwalks), an education and nature interpretation centre and a nursery displaying the biodiversity of local mangrove species. JNPT was to foot the annual cost of maintaining the park.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also drafted and sent for JNPT's approval in January 2021 following site visits by the FDCM and the preparation of a feasibility report. In March 2021, however, JNPT wrote back to the FDCM saying it "has decided not to enter into MoU for development of Eco Park under the green port initiative." Citing a contempt notice (dated December 2020) by NGO Vanashakti (which has filed a PIL in Bombay HC seeking compliance with its September 2018 judgement on mangrove transfer to the government), JNPT wrote to the mangrove cell for clarity earlier this year and were instructed in February to initiate the handover in accordance with the court's mandate.

A senior official with JNPT's PPD department, seeking anonymity, said, "The park would have been a valuable educational tool for the conservation of mangroves in our area, but seeing as the ownership of the land needs to be transferred to the state government, the development of this facility should also be taken up by them."

JNPT, which is legally mandated to transfer 913 hectares (ha) of mangroves on its property in Nhava Sheva to the Maharashtra forest department for safekeeping as per an order of the HC, earlier this year, claimed that it does not have any information as to the current extent of mangrove cover on its land. "We have enlisted the Maharashtra Remote Sensing Application Centre (MRSAC) for demarcation of mangrove area in JNPT as of date. Once we have the assessment we will inform the forest department and start the next steps," said the official quoted above.

Virendra Tiwari, assistant principal chief conservator of forests, mangrove cell, said, "We are hoping for a smooth and quick transfer of mangroves under JNPT to us. The land will be first notified as a reserve forest under section 4 of the Indian Forest Act (1927). After that, the process of settling any outstanding claims over the area will be settled so that it can get final notification under section 20 of the Act."

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/mumbai-news/jnpt-scraps-mangrove-park-proposal-in-uran-to-hand-over-land-to-forest-department-101635076860434.html>