

Activists claim Panje is wetland, share proof

Badri Chatterjee

badri.chatterjee@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: Environmentalists have questioned the state mangrove and wetland panel's claim that Panje is not a wetland. HT reported on Thursday that according to the panel, Panje in Navi Mumbai cannot be considered a wetland despite possessing characteristics of one, because the area is not designated as such in the National Wetland Atlas.

Two environmentalists on Thursday shared with the HC-appointed panel unverified coordinates and codes of areas across the 213-hectare Panje area, overlapping with the

zones identified in the National Wetland Atlas: Maharashtra State 2011.

Kharghar resident Naresh Singh from non-government organisation (NGO) Abhivyakti said that officials from the forest department themselves had shared three coordinates of intertidal mudflats, mangroves and salt pans matching with coordinates of Panje. "Since Panje is spread across a large area, the panel may have missed out on different types of wetlands. The whole inventory, which is public, only has a few coordinates for large spaces whereas wetlands can have multiple coordinates. The inventory needs to be updated,"

ENVIRONMENTALISTS SHARED WITH THE HC PANEL UNVERIFIED COORDINATES OF AREAS ACROSS THE PANJE AREA, OVERLAPPING WITH ZONES IDENTIFIED IN THE NATIONAL WETLAND ATLAS

he said.

Similarly, Debi Goenka from Conservation Action Trust shared nine coordinates and codes overlapping areas of Panje. "Mangroves, salt pans and intertidal areas all form

wetlands. The panel has been completely unprofessional in its approach. If a dedicated cell does not know where the wetlands are, we are facing a crisis," he said.

"It casts a huge shadow on the real intent of the state, which has constantly looked at ways to destroy wetlands to help constructions on important wetland bird habitats," said Stalin D, director, Vanashakti and member of the panel.

Neenu Somraj, member secretary of the panel, said, "We welcome the coordinates and codes shared by individuals. As of now, the exact codes do not reflect on the atlas. However, we will verify it again."