

## MITHI RIVER WIDENING: RS 25 LAKH FINE TO MMRDA

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The National Green Tribunal has imposed a cost of Rs 25 lakh on Mumbai Metropolitan Region and Development Authority (MMRDA) for not following due procedure to obtain coastal regulation zone (CRZ) clearance and causing environmental degradation while widening of Mithi river.

The green panel said MMRDA carried on with the widening of the river, construction and other allied activities on their project "without sanction of law" and was liable to pay environmental compensation.

"The project proponent MMRDA has started the project without compliance to the relevant provisions of law. It caused environmental degradation and even the blasting work was carried in violation to the relevant laws in force.

"Consequently, the respondent is liable to pay environmental compensation. At this initial stage, it is directed that the project proponent shall pay Rs 25 lakh as environmental compensation...", NGT Chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar said.

The panel also asked State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) to consider the project as it exists today and mention the amount which should be imposed upon the project proponent for "its defaults, violation of laws and for causing damage to the environment, ecology and biodiversity of river Mithi".

"SEIAA shall also compute environmental, ecological and other damage caused by the project and the remedial steps required to be taken in that direction.

"SEIAA shall ensure that the creek of river Mithi at the discharge point is duly protected. Because of the construction or any other reason the flow of river Mithi should not be adversely affected," it said.

The judgement came on the plea filed by NGOs Jalbiradari and Vanashakti which challenged the CRZ clearance granted for construction of retaining walls, service road, re-location of Bharat Nagar Police chowki along the banks of Mithi by MMRDA.

It had also sought direction to issue prohibitory orders to Ministry of Environment and Forests from carrying out blasting operations in the river.