

# GROSS GREEN VIOLATIONS IN SUNDARBANS: CAG

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

A view of Ghoramara island after high tide. File photo

A recent audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has pointed out illegal construction and violations of environmental norms in two Ramsar sites in West Bengal, the East Kolkata Wetlands (EKW) and the Sunderbans.

“There were illegal constructions in the EKW and Coastal Regulation Zone area in Sunderbans. However, such violations even in these ecologically fragile areas were rarely found to have been penalised; on a couple of rare occasions, (when) they were done, it was in compliance with the Kolkata High Court’s orders,” the CAG report said.

The report was made public in the last week of March before the West Bengal Legislative Assembly. The EKW, a unique peri-urban ecosystem that lies on the eastern fringes of Kolkata, covers an area of about 12,500 hectares. It is spread over 37 *mouzas* of the State’s South and North 24 Parganas districts. The CAG report pointed out that failure to delineate boundaries of the EKW and uncontrolled transfer of land resulted in its change of character and lack of effective action by the EKWMA (East Kolkata Wetland Management Authority).

“In absence of effective measures by EKWMA, waterbodies were dried up and filled illegally. Since 2007, EKWMA has identified 357 cases of violation, out of which 101 cases were identified between December 2015 and March 2020,” the audit said .

## Hovercraft station

The CAG has also raised a red flag about a hovercraft station in Frazerganj in South 24 Parganas district. “Indian Coast Guard applied (September 2017) for setting up a hovercraft station in Frazerganj,” the CAG stated. According to the site plan, ICG would construct a guard room, officer’s mess and accommodation, park, fuel bunk, sailors’ institute, holiday home and a play ground.

“CRZ notification disallows construction of residential buildings in the No Development Zone. CRZ clearances by the West Bengal State Coastal Zonal Management Authority for constructions of buildings ... was against the notification,” the report stated. The audit report points at a delay in the coastal zone management plan (CZMP), construction of multi-purpose cyclone shelters without clearances of CRZ norms and construction of three helipads and VIP rest houses in ecologically sensitive areas in the Sunderbans.

The CAG report has highlighted serious violations of CRZ norms in the Sunderbans particularly for an ecotourism project at Jharkhali. “The West Bengal government had undertaken (October 2015) a project of an ecotourism hub after clearing 69 acres of mangrove. Even the river channel, breeding place of crocodiles, was claimed by the project,” the report said.

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CAG report

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