

## Bellandur lake fire: Green court orders apartments in catchment area to build STPs

Residents said that they are waiting for the Pollution Board to release the list of building complexes that need to build these plants before deciding what they will do next.

- [Soumya Chatterjee](#)
- Tuesday, January 30, 2018 - 16:43



The relief that some older apartments in Bengaluru got with regards to setting up a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) retrospectively has turned out to be short-lived.

**Read: [Relief for Bengaluru flat dwellers, not all complexes now need sewage treatment plants](#)**

The National Green Tribunal on Monday, in its interim order in the Bellandur fire case, had called for every apartment in the Bellandur and Varthur catchment area to have modular STPs, among other steps to rejuvenate the lakes. To this effect, the green court asked the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) to direct 99 apartments to build STPs without damaging the structural safety of the buildings.

**Read: [‘Sewage Treatment Plants for apartments not feasible’: Bengaluru residents to protest](#)**

Reacting to this, Murlidhar Rao, vice-president of the Bangalore Apartments Federation (BAF), said that they are waiting for the list before responding. BAF has 174 apartment complexes under its aegis.

“We have to see if these 99 apartments are letting their sewage into the rajakaluves or the lake directly. We oppose setting up STPs in apartments which already have Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) approved sewage line. I have always maintained that those apartments which do not have sewerage connection to the underground drainage system have to install STPs,” Murlidhar told TNM.

“We had also opposed the discrimination as individual apartment owners are asked to pay 3x for water and sanitation charges when compared to individual houses, even though per capita consumption is same,” he added.

In mid-December last year Bengaluru Development Minister KJ George, under public pressure, announced that the March 2016 notification asking STPs to be installed in all apartment complexes retrospectively in the city limits will be withdrawn completely. Prior to this, in March, 2017, the rule was revised to only include apartments with more than 50 units.

The announcement by the government that apartments flouting the rule might lose their water and electricity connection was met with strong protests, which paved the way for the minister’s decision to withdraw the rule.

Their reason for their anger and frustration are multifold. Buying and maintaining STPs are expensive, and experts say they come with their own safety risks.

**Read: [‘We pay taxes, why force us to install STPs?’: Bengaluru apartment dwellers protest](#)**

Moreover, apartment owners feel that they are being punished for no fault of theirs. They said the decision was a knee-jerk reaction to the NGT’s reprimand to the state government over the lake-burning issue.

Arguing that the government had reportedly told the NGT that apartments contribute less than 3% of the city's sewage, Murlidhar said that apartments were being made the scapegoat when the administration is slammed for the foaming lakes.

Moreover, apartment owners allege that not only does the KSPCB change its guidelines often, it also issues fraudulent reports on the quality of STPs.

### **Expert view**

Priyanka Jamwal, a scientist at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), stresses the need for both centralised and de-centralised STPs for a city of Bengaluru's scale.

“However, it may not be possible for old buildings to find space to set up these STPs,” she said, adding that the green court should realise that apartments aren't the only ones releasing sewage into the Bellandur lake.

She also said, “Most lakes in Bengaluru are connected, and Bellandur and Varthur are in the receiving end of all the sewage from the eastern half of the city. The NGT should also focus on other factors leading to untreated sewage reaching the lake beds.”

Speaking on the issue earlier, Priyanka had said that there needs to be a thorough scrutiny of treated water from the city's STPs as they are not well equipped to handle strong chemicals and antibiotics used in present day domestic products. She pointed out the lack of proper regulation is also part of the problem.

She told, “Barring Jakkur lake, where there is a strong civil society group, every lake in the city receives a significant amount of untreated sewage despite presence of STP s.”

In Monday's interim order, the state government has been asked to ensure industrial pollutants/effluents do not enter the lakes untreated. The NGT has also asked IISc Bangalore to carry out study of the lifecycle of Macrophytes and its biological removal/eradication and de-sedimentation. The matter will be heard again on February 28 when the state government has to submit action plan regarding disposal of solid municipal waste and other waste.