

NGT orders highly polluting Taloja effluent plant to deposit Rs 5 crore

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NAVI MUMBAI: In a major relief for people living along the Kasadi river and Vashi creek that are being polluted by toxic industrial effluent, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has ordered the Taloja central effluent treatment plant (CETP) Co-operative Society Ltd to deposit Rs 5 crore with the district magistrate within a month. The district magistrate has been directed to keep the money “in a separate fund subject to further orders”. Taloja is the most-polluting CETP in the state and has been categorised as a non-performing plant by the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB). In fact, the CETP in Navi Mumbai has been recording very high levels of BOD (Biochemical Oxygen Demand) and COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand), which are wastewater quality indicators.

In its order on April 11, the NGT’s principal bench, Delhi, pointed at the pollution caused since 2013 and directed the CETP cooperative society to commence work of upgrading the plant within one month failing which they will be liable to punitive action.

Panvel corporator Arvind Mhatre, who filed the petition in NGT, told TOI: “The order has vindicated our fight. A joint survey by central and state pollution control boards has confirmed high levels of pollution.”

Fixing the next hearing for May 11, the NGT directed the CETP to report on measures taken to fix the untreated discharge. The

plant is now under an administrator as the CETP board dissolved last year. It is awaiting takeover by the MIDC. Sources said there are three bidders to upgrade and operate the CETP , and one has been shortlisted The MIDC board is likely to give nod for the contract in 10-15 days.

The tribunal also directed MPCB to suggest steps for preventing discharge of effluent into the river till effective action is taken with regard to the CETP's functioning. The MPCB also has to submit an action-taken report with regard to such discharge every week, starting April 19.

B D Ahire, who took over as the CETP administrator in January, told TOI: "I am most likely to challenge the order before the Supreme Court. The CETP does not have funds... I will have to ask the industry association for the funding." However, Taloja Industry Association president Satish 'Anna' Shetty said: "Why should the industry make the payment? The administrator should be asked to pay."