

Lack of coordination adds to pollution in Keenjhar Lake

By M Iqbal Khwaja

THATTA, Nov 30: Absence of coordination among different departments has led to an increase in pollution, loss of biodiversity and deterioration of the quality of water in Keenjhar Lake, according to regional director of WWF Pakistan Dr Ghulam Akbar.

Mr Akbar said in an interview on Sunday that the lake declared as a wildlife sanctuary in 1977 under the Sindh Wildlife Protection Ordinance attracted thousands of migratory as well as indigenous birds and needed serious attention.

The departments of irrigation, fisheries, wildlife and Sindh Tourism Development Corporation, Karachi Water and Sewerage Board were responsible for looking after the lake but they worked in isolation due to absence of a proper mechanism of coordination.

He said that ideally they should supplement each others' efforts to protect the wetland. Under the WWF Pakistan, four sites in Sindh, including Keenjhar, Keti Bundar, Chotiariyoon reservoir in Sanghar and Pai forest in Nawabshah, had been selected for ecological assessment, and socio-economic studies to bring forth facts about the current situation of the area.

He said that the WWF was striving to bring together all the stakeholders, including the district government and local communities, to play a role in rehabilitation and conservation of the sites.

Mr Akbar said that over 50,000 people depended for their livelihood on fish at the four fish landing centres at the lake Khumbo, Chilya, Sonher and Jhampir. They included Gandhra, Hilaya, Palari, Khaskheli and Mir Bahar communities.

The lake had a rich flora of submerged, floating and emergent aquatic plants and it was also rich in fish.

The livelihood of local communities mainly depended on the resources, which came to about 700 tons but the lake had the potential for producing around 10,000 tons, he said.

He said that the population of migratory birds recorded at Keenjhar in 1970 was between 50,000 and 150,000 which dropped to 30,016 in 2002.

Nasir Panhwar, programme coordinator of WWF, criticised lack of civic sense among majority of lake visitors and pointed out that over 15,000 to 20,000 picnickers who came there every weekend threw the waste, polythene bags and empty cans etc into the lake and motorists washed their vehicles in knee-deep water.

He said that avoiding de-weeding was a constant problem. The weeds kept growing each day and blocked sunlight, which was vital for many fish and living organisms.

The rescue boat provided by police had been abandoned and there were no proper arrangements to protect people.