

**Yala National Park**  
**Q&A update on the raised public concerns regarding**  
**the Yala water pipeline for wildlife conservation and management**

**1. Why interfere with the natural system and pump water to waterholes?**

Parts of the Yala NP are actively managed for tourism purposes and visitation experience. Provision of water for wildlife conservation and management during the critical drought periods are part of such management that has been done in Yala NP over the last [two decades]. This was done using diesel pumps in the past with temporary water pipes and the department discontinued that as it causes negative environmental consequences such as sound pollution, air pollution and high cost etc. Now limited water provision is done using solar pumps with low water velocity pipes during peak drought. This activity will replace temporary pipe laying and leakages. No new pumps are planned to be used. Generally speaking, natural ecosystems should not be interfered with but in wildlife management planned interventions to manage natural systems may be necessary in order to achieve targeted conservation goals. A few examples of most commonly practiced wildlife habitat management for conservation purposes include 1) grasslands are controlled burned for creating palatability. 2) Salt licks are created for animals in visitor zones. 3) Water provision for animals is done in visitor zones or in acute droughts etc. All such interventions are done aiming at a management objective. It can create palatable grasses for herbivores, control alien invasives, avoid wild animals moving into human habitations during droughts, ease out the pressure created from human interventions such as tourism etc. In Yala the water provision is done during peak droughts, in the visitor zone only.

**2. Will there be adequate water in the Menik Ganga during the dry season for this venture?**

Yes the Weheragala reservoir provides adequate environmental flow and that amount is sufficient for this purpose. The tanks will not be completely filled but only to avoid the muddy hard pan from cracking and maintain a small amount of water to provide bare minimum requirement. No new water holes are created and the water levels are monitored regularly during droughts. Water pumping will be done intermittently, not continuously depending on the need. The department's estimate in additional water needs is not more than 50 tons per day.

**3. How deep will the trench be when it gets close to the Mahaseelawa kanda?**

The pipeline trenches will not go deeper than 3 feet.

**4. Will there be adequate pressure to take the water all the way to Palatupana under gravity flow?**

According to previous experiences and the capacity of the existing solar pump it can provide water up to Palatupana. The water pipe system will maintain a low velocity and be laid in a manner which minimizes the friction losses.

**5. Why is the trench so deep and the trace so wide (4-5 meters)?**

Trench is not exceeding 3 feet in depth and width. But when digging the trench due to the accuracy of the machinery and the operator's skill it can slightly vary..

**6. Why can't water be brought by bowser to the water holes during the drought? Same for the staff at Palatupana?**

Transportation of water by bowser creates more pollution, and is a costly operation. Sustainability depends on availability of adequate operational costs. It is common knowledge that pipelines are the most efficient and economical mode of transport for liquids among other alternatives. This pipeline will be low cost as it operates on solar energy and after the trenches are filled the habitat will recover causing zero impact in the long run. This is a more sustainable system compared to transportation of water by bowser.

**7. Elephants will dig up the pipeline when they hear the water flowing underground. How do you plan to prevent that?**

Early trials helped us understand this factor. Not only elephants but even wild boars can sense water. The 3 feet depth helps us to minimize that risk. Early trials were done at a lesser depth and we found 3 feet depth of a pipeline is adequate to prevent animals from sensing and digging for the water. In addition, the availability of water in waterholes negates the need for digging for water.

**8. Has an EIA been done?**

Activity has an Environment and Social Management Plan; the contractor implementing the works has been advised to adhere to ESMP and the Department has been monitoring the works. No trees were cut due to these works; the pipeline runs within the right of way of a road which again minimizes the environmental impacts. Bushes and herbaceous vegetation has been affected temporarily within the work zone / ROW, these impacts will be re-assessed and remedies such as assisted regeneration will be done to recover the impact.

**9. Why have the long lengths of trench been dug? It impedes animal movement.**

The contractor is advised to keep an opening of one kilometer at a time the maximum. The identified animal movement paths are filled immediately after digging. However, due to a technical issue, sections longer than 1 km remained open in September and October. The pipes were to be laid on a bed of quarry dust. But during construction, the contractor faced an acute shortage of quarry dust. Sand was proposed as an alternative bedding material. Contractual approvals for this variation and sourcing of sand took some time. As the North East monsoon is expected at the middle of October and trenching is not possible in the rain, the contractor opened longer sections, in order to expedite the laying of pipes and backfilling before the monsoon rains commence. But care was taken to have sections of filled trench for identified animal movement paths and at waterholes, so that access to the water was not impeded. The issue of bedding material has been resolved and now only one kilometer at a time is being opened.

**10. Shouldn't the DWC be required to do EIAs for all their development activities within protected areas—Lunugamwehera EHG trench?**

Environment studies are mandated for degazetting or changing the boundaries of protected areas. [NR1] This water pipeline is part of the Yala's wildlife conservation and management plan for facilitating tourism activities in the park's visitor zone. Such management activities are done aiming to create conservation benefits. The DWLC has undertaken an environmental and social screening and based on the screening decision a comprehensive Environment and Social Management Plan has been prepared which is part of the contractor's agreement. The contractor and workers have been provided orientation training on the application of the ESMP

at the time of contractor mobilization and given strict guidelines to avoid negative impacts and consequences and to adhere to the mitigation measures outlined in the ESMP. Specially construction materials such as sand and metals are not allowed to be extracted from the protected areas. The contract is monitored on a regular basis by the Department.

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[NR1]While this may be the regulation, this statement gives the notion EIAs are not needed for anything other than this. Can we instead say 'Env studies are mandated by law for degazetting or altering PA boundaries. However, depending on the nature and extent of other proposed work, relevant env studies are undertaken commensurate with the anticipated impacts.

### **Patanangala Visitor Center and Beat Office**

#### **1. Why are you building a restaurant inside the park?**

No restaurant is constructed inside the park which prepares and serves food. Patanangala and paranato tupola are the two places where visitors are allowed to get down and relax. Those places are often used for consuming the own food taken by visitors. Due to excessive visitation in Yala, the DWC has instituted a prohibition of travel or movement of vehicles between 12 noon and 2 pm. Most visitors are Patnangala during this period. There are no facilities at present and visitors have to sit in the open or in their vehicles during this period. The patanangala visitor center provides self-maintained seating facilities for visitors to relax and enjoy their own short eats. This is constructed in the area where the former Patanangala Bungalow existed before the tsunami.

#### **2. Why has it got to be so large?**

Patanangala Visitor Center's site is 100 x 200 m and is located on the footprint of the old Patanangala bungalow at the premises, i.e. the previously used site. DWC has observed that during the visitation periods up to 30-40 vehicles are parked at various places causing the nearby area to be eroded and degraded. The visitor center will provide reinforced surface, organized parking space for 30-40 vehicles and a simple shelter with open space for the visitors to sit and relax. The visitors will be restricted to this area and it will help restore the damaged nearby areas.

#### **3. Why does it have 2 stories?**

It is not a 2 story building. It is a single story building with a roof made of concrete to minimize the maintenance and reduce damages from wildlife, such as monkeys and wild boars. The concrete slab (roof) can be used by the visitors as an observation deck where they can see the sea and the Patanangala rock which are iconic elements in the panorama.

#### **4. What are your plans for garbage management and cleaning up at the site?**

The park maintains a garbage-free policy. Garbage disposal is not allowed and whatever the things you take in need to take out. Officers permanently posted in the beat office will be enforcing the rules among the jeep drivers and visitors. The activities of the traditional seasonal fishing establishment will also be monitored which was not done earlier. The DWC has experience of managing solid waste in Bungalows inside the PAs without any negative

impact to the environment and it will not be a challenge for DWC to manage the waste at Patanangala centre

**5. Will it attract wildlife to scavenge?**

Organized visitor center will be easier to monitor and help improve the current status of the nearby environment. No garbage would be allowed for leaving on the site. Visitors would have to take back their own garbage.

**6. If you did not have a rule prohibiting people to travel between 12 – 2 this monstrosity would not be needed.**

This organized visitor center is one of the two places where visitors are allowed to get down and relax. This location draws a larger number of visitors than Parana Thotupola and therefore needs better organization and monitoring.

**7. What is the scientific rationale for prohibiting movement between 12 – 2 pm?**

The Yala national park is the one having the highest visitor impacts. The rule prohibiting the visitors' movement between noon and 2 pm was imposed to keep animals resting during the extremely hot time of the day. This rule was created with a mutual agreement between the safari operators and the department. It was also welcomed by the concerned citizens, educated visitors and conservationists.

**8. Why do you need a beat office near the fishing village?**

It is not a fishing village but a site seasonally occupied by fishermen during the harvesting season. There are concerns about the behavior of the fishermen and there was a need to monitor them during the day and night (they stay in the park during nights).

**9. Wouldn't this interfere with the natural movement of wildlife life?**

Visitor center is constructed on the footprint of the Patanangala bungalow and the premises and the beat office is constructed on the footprint of the Navy camp located during the war period. The animal movement paths are avoided in setting out the building.