

## **Minutes of the community consultation for the construction of Visitor Centre at Patanangala, Yala National Park**

Date 10.02.2021 at 10.30am

Venue – Park Office, Paltupana, Yala National park

List of Participants:

1. Director Operations, DWC – Mr. Ranjan Marasinghe
2. Representative from WB team – Dr Sumith Pilapitiya
3. Project manager – ECAMP – Mr. Dhanushka Wikramasinghe
4. Environment and Social Safeguard Consultant – Dr. Lakshman Peiris
5. Assistant Director DWC – Mr. W.A.A.D.U Indrajith
6. Architect – Mr. Isuru De Zoysa
7. Park Warden Yala National Park – Mr. Manoj Widyaratne
8. Representatives from Department of Coast Conservation – Hambanthota
9. Representatives from Hotel sector – Thissamaharama
10. Representatives from safari Jeep owners
11. Representatives from Community Outreach societies
12. Volunteer Guides
13. Representatives from Palatupana Saltern

After welcoming the participants, Dr Lakshman Peiris has introduced the objectives of the meeting and invited all to make their comments on the construction of a Visitor Centre at Patanangala, Yala National Park.

Architect Mr. Isuru De Zoysa has presented the architectural designs and the facilities that will be available at the centre. According to him, a parking space for 30 jeeps, toilet, resting place, a souvenir shop, an Information Centre and an observation area are available at the Centre. The centre will be run by Solar Power.

Accommodation facilities for the maintenance staff of the Centre will be provided at the building to be constructed nearby.

Dr. Lakshman Peiris has stated that an ESMP for the construction of Visitor Centre has been developed by the Environment team of the ESCAMP and the document will be readily available at the Web Site. He has pointed out that many of the possible environmental and social impacts have been addressed by the ESMP. However, for further improvement of the plan, the participants were invited for their comments and suggestions.

Assistant Director, Coast Conservation Department – Mr T.T Indunil has stated that though the proposed site is located within a wildlife reserve it has come under the Department of Coast Conservation (DOCC) jurisdiction. Therefore, he suggested that the advisory board of the DOCC to be informed on the construction. He has further stated that since the Centre will be established in a Wildlife conservation area, and managed under the wildlife protection laws, the consent can be granted in principle. However, DOCC needs to be informed. Mr. Indunil has further stated that the required space should be made available from the Coastal Line to the construction site.

Director Operations, DWC Mr. Ranjan Marasinghe has stated, the Department has to face a number of difficulties due to the unavailability of the facilities to control the situation. Locating the centre beyond the 300m of coastline would create more environmental damages. He has further pointed out that the proposed site That place is already in the middle of various disturbances and used as a resting site for the visitors.

Assistant Director, Mr Indunil stated, if the centre is located within 300m of the coast line, then a suitable environmental assessment has to be carried out. However, the consent of the DOCC can be granted for the construction, because the proposed Centre will be a public property and will be used for conservation related activity. It will also be under the control of a conservation agency, the DWC.

Architect Mr. Zoysa has stated that when the original designs were carried out in 2017, the DOCC reserves were situated only 50m from the coastal line. The design was carried out under such situation.

Then Mr. Indunil stated that an amendment was made in 2018 and now the restricted space goes for 300m distance.

Project Manager, Escamp has stated that the project is going to be over in July next year and the construction has to be started as soon as possible to complete the work within the project period. This issue has to be resolved without delay.

Mr. Ranjan Marasinghe has pointed out that the proposed Centre will be established purely for the conservation purposes. Current situation may create many issues to the natural environment. He also stated that the Yala as a world recognised national park, should have such facilities.

Mr Indunil has stated that the construction will not be an issue if the DOCC is informed.

Dr Sumith Pilapitiya has pointed out the possibility of getting the consent from DOCC within 3 months. Mr Indunil has stated that there is a possibility to get the consent within 3 Months period.

A representative from the Jeep Owners Association, Tissamaharamaya, has pointed out that the construction may create some issues. Therefore, he requested to explain the procedures of the contract and the centre management procedures. He has also mentioned the value of establishing a visitor centre at Patanangala.

Mr Ranjan Marasinghe has explained that the construction is purely come under the control of Department of Wildlife Conservation, and the funding will be from world bank. The Government tender procedure has to be adopted. Maintenance will be done by the Department. The maintenance staff will be recruited to the Department.

Dr Sumith Pilapitiya has stated that though the World Bank is providing funds for the construction, the management of the centre will be totally come under the DWC. The World Bank will not be involving in the procurement process or for the management of the Centre.

Project Manager Mr. Dhanushka Wikramasinghe has stated that the ESCAMP as a third party, is helping to the DWC to setup the centre. Environment and social parameters will be monitored by the ESCAMP. He has further stated that no single tree will be removed due to the construction and all possible precautions will be taken to mitigate the possible impacts.

Secretary of the Tissamaramaya Independent Jeep Owners Association has stated that suitable sanitary facilities including toilets facilities should be improved. Communication facilities have to be improved too.

He has further stated and requested the World Bank to facilitate Jeep drivers to improve their services.

Dr. Sumith Pilapitiya has stated that, the Wold Bank is not a commercial bank. It gives funds to the Government, not as personal. Therefore, this request cannot be entertained by the World Bank.

Responding to the question raised by the Tissamaharamaya Independent Jeep owner's society, Mr. Ranjan Marasingha has stated that the sanitary facilities will be improved under the project, but communication issue is a quite complex one. A suitable method will be adopted in near future.

Secretary of the Tissamaharamaya Independent Jeep owner's society has further stated many of the local jeep owners have suffered due to the Travel Bubble method.

Mr Marasinghe has pointed out that the travel Bubble system has been introducing to facilitate tourism industry by the Government. Therefore, this issue should be resolved at the local level and the Department could not intervene in this regard.

Assistant Director of DWC (Uva Region) has pointed out that issues may have arisen with regard to the maintenance of the centre and its safety. Damages may cause due to animal attack and rain water accumulation and possible delays of the contracts.

Mr. Isury Zoysa has explained on the safety measures that has been designed to protect the centre from animal and rain water.

Mr Ranjan Marasinghe has stated that a suitable method will be implemented for the protection and maintenance of the centre.

Project Manager Mr. Dhanushka has pointed out the issues that could be arisen due to the delays of the contract and that legal steps will be taken if the contract will be delayed.

The Tissamaharama Independent Jeep Owners Association has raised another issue regarding the travel restriction period from 20.00 -2.00pm. He requested the restriction to be lifted or to be amended the time period.

Mr Marasinghe has stated that the travel restriction within the park was introduced for the benefit of the animals in the park and it gives positive conservation message to the international community. However, the issue will be discussed with the authorities.

Dr. Sumith Pilapitiya has stated that the World Bank is not involving with any of the local matters of the park management. The travel restriction is a decision that has been taken by the Department, not by the World Bank.

Volunteer Guide Mr. Ishan has raised an issue on the legality of the Patanangala fishing activity.

Responding to this question, Mr. Marasingaha has stated that under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance (FFPO), Patanangala has been recognised as a traditional fishing site. Therefore, the fishermen have the right to fishing at Patanangala.

Development Officer Mr N. Ediriweera has pointed out the possible impact to the Turtles recorded in the beach.

Dr. Lakshman Peiris has stated that any construction works will not be taken place after 6.00pm and the possible impact could be minimised. The contractors are not allowed to use flash lights too.

A representative from the Hotel owners has raised a question on the garbage disposal and management at the Centre.

Dr. Lakshman has stated that there will not be a garbage collection issue at the centre. Because the visitors themselves have to take back all the stuffs they bring to the park. Nor a dust bin neither a dumping site will be maintained at the centre.

Park Warden Mr. Manoj Widyaratne has stated that the project is very important to the visitor management in the park. Therefore, the project should be implemented with least possible delay with resolving anticipated issues. He has further stated that the support from all the parties would be expected to materialise the proposal.

The discussion was concluded at 1.30pm