

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI**

Original Application No.676/2023

In re: News item appearing in The Times of India dated 12.10.2023 titled
**“Agricultural Runoff causing groundwater pollution in Punjab,
making Drinking Water unsafe, Reveals Study ”**

Date of hearing: 03.11.2023

**CORAM: HON’BLE MR. JUSTICE PRAKASH SHRIVASTAVA, CHAIRPERSON
HON’BLE MR. JUSTICE SUDHIR AGARWAL, JUDICIAL MEMBER
HON’BLE DR. A. SENTHIL VEL, EXPERT MEMBER**

Respondent: Mr. Abhay Dev Sharma, Advocate with Mr. Avtar Singh, Scientific Officer,
Punjab PCB (Through VC)

ORDER

1. This original application has been registered in suo-moto exercise of power on the basis of the news item published on 12.10.2023 in the Times of India, titled “Agricultural Runoff causing groundwater pollution in Punjab, making Drinking Water unsafe, Reveals Study ”

2. As per the said news item, in a research released by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi, it has been found that human activity has increased ground water pollution, particularly, through agricultural runoff in Punjab, making it unsafe for drinking and raising health risks.

3. The report reveals that on account of increase in the demand of ground water, local farmers exploiting ground water from deeper geological strata which are enriched in heavy metals and few are radioactive, having serious health impacts. Such incidents relating to declining in water quality are mainly in Southwestern region of Punjab. The report states that Punjab once celebrated as the ‘bread bowl of India’, is now infamously referred to as the ‘cancer capital of India’, reflecting the

dire consequences of water pollution and its impact on human health. As per the report, immediate action is required at the end of the concerned authorities to investigate the quality of groundwater for drinking and irrigation purposes.

4. The tribunals power to register suo-moto OA has been recognized in the matter of *“Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai vs. Ankita Sinha & Ors.”* reported in 2021 SCC Online SC 897.

5. On advance notice, Punjab Pollution Control Board has filed a short reply seeking time to file response to the news item report. It was informed that Punjab PCB is monitoring ground water quality at 46 locations but, could not give the water quality status.

6. Having regard to the facts disclose in the news item, we deem it proper to implead following parties as Respondents:-

- (i) Central Pollution Control Board through its Member Secretary;
- (ii) Punjab Pollution Control Board through its Member Secretary;
- (iii) Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi; though its Director;
- (iv) Department of Water Supply and Sanitation, State of Punjab through its Administrative Head
- (v) Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, State of Punjab though its Administrative Head;

7. Registry is directed to serve the above Respondents except PPCB which is represented today.

8. The Punjab Pollution Control Board is directed to file report in response to the facts disclosed in the news item report, inter-alia,

including the issue of heavy metals, radioactive substance, pesticides and chemicals pollutants found in the ground water of the concerned area in sample testing.

9. Let the report be submitted within a period of six weeks

10. List the matter on 18.01.2024.

Prakash Shrivastava, CP

Sudhir Agarwal, JM

Dr. A. Senthil Vel, EM

November 03, 2023
Original Application No.676/2023
JG