**Item No.1:-**

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL**
**SOUTHERN ZONE, CHENNAI**

***Tuesday, the 24th day of June 2025.***

[Through Physical Hearing (Hybrid Option)]

**Original Application No.73 of 2025 (SZ)**

IN THE MATTER OF:

Tribunal on its own motion **Suo Motu** based on the news item published in 'The Times of India', Chennai edition dt.01.04.2025, titled **"More than 1000 trees to be axed to widen Avinashi – Mettupalayam Road"**

***WITH***

1) **Union of India**
Through the Secretary,
Ministry of Environment and Forest,
Indira Paryavaran Bhavan,
Jor Bagh, New Delhi - 110 003.

2) **The Principal Secretary to Govt. of Tamil Nadu**
Department of Environment, Climate Change and Forests,
Govt. Secretariat, Fort St. George,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu – 600 009.

3) **The Principal Secretary to Govt. of Tamil Nadu**
Highways and Minor Ports Department,
Govt. Secretariat, Fort St. George,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu – 600 009.

4) **The Chairman**
Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board,
No. 76, Anna Salai, Guindy,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu - 600 032.

5) **The District Collector**
7/1, State Bank Rd,
Gopalapuram,
Coimbatore – 641 018,
Tamil Nadu.

...Respondent(s)

For Applicant(s): Suo Motu.

For Respondent(s): Mr. Sai Srujan Tayi for R1.
Dr. D. Shanmuganathan for R2, R3 & R5.
Mr. S. Sai Sathya Jith for R4.

**Judgment Reserved on: 18th June, 2025.**

**CORAM**:

**HON'BLE Smt. JUSTICE PUSHPA SATHYANARAYANA, JUDICIAL MEMBER**

**HON'BLE Dr. SATYAGOPAL KORLAPATI, EXPERT MEMBER**

**J U D G E M E N T**

***Delivered by Smt. Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana, Judicial Member***

**1.** The above-captioned Original Application has been Suo Motu registered by this Tribunal based on the news item reported in 'The Times of India', Chennai Edition dated 01.04.2025 titled ***"More than 1000 trees to be axed to widen Avinashi–Mettupalayam road"***.

**2.** It is reported in the newspaper that the widening of the Avinashi–Mettupalayam road is proceeding at the expense of the region's green cover. According to the report, the State Highways Department, after felling 470 trees on the 13-kilometre Avinashi–Nariyampalli stretch last month, has now commenced the removal of an additional 1,342 trees on the Nariyampalli–Mettupalayam stretch. The project, valued at Rs.226 Crores, aims to convert the existing two-lane, 38-kilometre road—from Avinashi in Tirupur district to Mettupalayam in Coimbatore district—into a four-lane highway. The current width of the two-lane road is approximately seven meters, and in view of the prevailing traffic congestion, the authorities are expanding it to a width of 16.2 meters.

**3.** It is further reported that the project is being undertaken in two phases. In the first phase, covering a distance of 13 kilometers from Avinashi to Nariyampalli, Rs.80 Crore has been sanctioned, and 470 trees have already been removed. The

second phase, extending over 25 kilometers from Nariyampalli to Mettupalayam, is being executed with an allocation of Rs.146 Crore, during which 1,342 trees are currently being felled. Of the trees marked for removal, it is stated that 550 grown trees are proposed to be relocated.

**4.** The news item also highlights the official's claim that efforts are underway to plant ten saplings for every tree felled, making use of land available under the jurisdiction of the State Highways Department. However, public concerns have been raised regarding the adequacy and authenticity of such compensatory measures.

**5.** Upon notice, the **Highways and Minor Ports Department (Respondent No.3)** has filed a detailed **status report dated 17.06.2025**, wherein it is stated that the State Government has implemented mechanisms to ensure regulated tree management through the constitution of Green Committees, as directed by the Hon'ble High Court in W.P. No.11094 of 2021. Pursuant to these directions, Government Orders [G.O.Ms.No.39 dated 02.07.2021 and G.O.Ms.No.66 dated 07.04.2022] were issued for the constitution of State and District Green Committees to oversee tree cutting and plantation activities on public lands. In compliance with these directives, the Chief Minister's Road Development Project (**CMRDP**) 2024–2025 was initiated for widening the Avinashi–Mettupalayam Road from two lanes to four lanes. Following the removal of 477 trees along the Avinashi–Nariyampalli stretch (13 km), the Highways Department began felling 1,342 trees on the Nariyampalli–Mettupalayam stretch for the sanctioned Rs.226 crore project covering 38 km, with prior approvals from the District Green Committee.

**6.** It is further stated that all tree-felling activities have been undertaken only after securing permissions through proceedings issued by the District Forest Officer, Coimbatore, and the Revenue Divisional Officer, Coimbatore North Division, upon receipt of field verification reports from respective Tahsildars. The detailed locations, tree counts, and proposed replantation figures are as follows:

| Location | No. of trees cut | No. of trees replanted | No. of trees retained |
|---|---|---|---|
| From Km 32/2 to 35/4 (left side) | 78 | 15 | 5 |
| From Km 35/2 to 37/2 (left side): | 21 | 4 | 1 |
| From Km 28/4 to 30/8 (right side): | 91 | 2 | 3 |
| From Km 15/4 to 17/4 (right side): | 79 | 15 | 5 |
| From Km 16/6 to 19/0 (left side): | 83 | 3 | 12 |
| From Km 13/0 to 16/6 (left side): | 76 | 21 | 1 |
| From Km 13/0 to 15/4 (right side): | 44 | 38 | 11 |
| From Km 28/4 to 30/2 (left side): | 79 | 18 | 1 |

**7.** The District Green Committee, chaired by the District Collector, convened a meeting on 21.04.2025 and approved the removal and replanting of 25 tamarind and 127 coconut trees in the premises of the Coimbatore Central Prison for the construction of "Semmozhi Poonga". It is emphatically stated that no government or court orders have been violated in any manner. The CMRDP has been implemented strictly in accordance with the guidelines of the Hon'ble High Court of Madras and the relevant Government Orders. The tree-felling activities were duly approved by the Green Committee and the required replantation has been incorporated in the project estimates.

**8.** Regarding the compensatory afforestation, the report states that the estimate includes provision for planting 4,770 saplings (at a 1:10 ratio for 477 trees axed) along the project stretch. Of these, 3,270 saplings are proposed along the Avinashi–Mettupalayam Road (SH-80) and 1,500 saplings are to be planted along the abandoned NH-47 Salem–Cochin Road at Avinashi Town (SHU-155), of which 500 have already been planted and the remaining 1,000 will be planted during the upcoming monsoon.

**9.** The submissions made by the learned counsel appearing for the official respondents and also the report filed by the State Highways Department have been duly considered.

**10.** The news item about the cutting of trees triggered the Tribunal to take suo motu cognizance of the matter, prompting the initiation of this proceeding to examine the environmental implications arising from the proposed road widening project.

**11.** From the status report of the State Highways Department, this Tribunal notes that the project in question involves a significant infrastructure upgrade – from a 7-metre-wide two-lane road to a 16.2-metre-wide four-lane highway – which is expected to ease traffic congestion and contribute to regional development. However, such developmental activities must not come at the irreversible cost of ecological balance. Further, permissions from forest and revenue authorities, based on due verification, were secured prior to tree removal.

**12.** We note with caution the scale of tree felling involved in the project, totaling **1,819 trees (470 in Phase I** and **1,342 in Phase II)**. As per the report, compensatory afforestation at a **1:10 ratio** (4,770 saplings for 477 trees felled in Phase I) has been incorporated into the project estimate. The plan proposes: - (i) **3,270 saplings** along Avinashi–Mettupalayam Road (SH-80) and (ii) **1,500 saplings** along the abandoned NH-47 (SHU-155), of which 500 have already been planted and the remaining 1,000 are scheduled during the upcoming monsoon. Additionally, specific details of tree felling, replantation, and retention along various kilometer sections of the road have been provided and duly approved by the District Green Committee.

**13.** Needless to say, trees form an essential component of the ecological framework, serving to purify the air, stabilize soil, sustain biodiversity, regulate microclimatic conditions, and provide significant socio-cultural benefits. The principle of *sustainable development*—as enshrined in Indian environmental jurisprudence—mandates that development must not compromise environmental integrity. Further, the concept of *inter-generational equity* also requires us to preserve natural resources for future generations. Thus, while infrastructure development is necessary, environmental costs must be internalized and mitigated through scientifically managed afforestation and conservation strategies.

**14.** While the justification advanced on grounds of public necessity and road safety is duly acknowledged, compensatory measures must not remain theoretical but require strict implementation and continuous oversight. Mere plantation of saplings is insufficient; their survival, growth, and contribution to ecological restoration must be ensured through sustained monitoring and periodic reporting. Furthermore, plantation initiatives should prioritize a diverse mix of native and resilient species (e.g., Neem, Tamarind, Poongan, Kadamba, Naval, Mahilam), with independent audits conducted to assess survival rates.

**15.** In view of the foregoing, this Tribunal is satisfied that the project, though involving significant tree loss, has been undertaken with procedural compliance and an afforestation plan has been duly approved by the competent authorities. However, to ensure accountability and meaningful environmental offsets, it would be appropriate to issue the following directions to the State Highways Department (Respondent No.3).

**(i)** The State Highways Department shall ensure the full execution of the compensatory plantation plan (4,770 saplings) within the next two planting seasons, with priority to native species (e.g., Neem, Tamarind, Poongan, Kadamba, Naval, Mahilam), alongside other resilient species as appropriate.

**(ii)** The State Highways Department shall undertake the responsibility for maintaining all saplings for a period of at least five years or till they grow to a considerable size, including watering, fencing and replacing any saplings that fail.

**(iii)** A geo-tagged database of trees felled, saplings planted, and their status shall be maintained and made publicly accessible on the department's official website.

**(iv)** Any further tree felling under this project shall be allowed only upon verification of compliance with the afforestation targets already undertaken.

**16. With the above directions, the Original Application [O.A. No.73 of 2025 (SZ)] is disposed of.**

**Sd/-**
**Smt. Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana, JM**

**Sd/-**
**Dr. Satyagopal Korlapati, EM**

Internet – Yes/No

All India NGT Reporter – Yes/No

**O.A. No.73/2025 (SZ)**
**24th June, 2025. Mn.**

सत्यमेव जयते
NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL, NEW DELHI
NGT