



## BRIEFING NOTE

The East Kolkata Wetlands help us in climate resilience, and have been identified as risk mitigating green infrastructure that will help the city better survive if the wetlands are protected. For that, the wetlands have to be maintained, chiefly by excavating its canals and fish ponds, which are long overdue. Some plans have been made for excavation of canals and some work has started. However, excavating the canals without excavating the fishponds will not ensure that this ecosystem is able to provide its best services and ensure climate risk mitigation.

Below are some of the facts that are essential for drawing up any plan for desiltation of fish ponds or bheries:

Total waterbody area in EKW – 5852.14 ha

% of waterbody area under co-operatives registered with the Fisheries Department – 5%

% of waterbody area under SFDC – 4.5%

Roughly, about 90% area is under unregistered cooperatives, private ownership or Fish Production Groups that get a modicum of government support.

Size range of the bheries – from 2 acres to 200 acres

### Challenges:

1. Since demarcation of land in this area belonging to the government has lagged behind after the Land Ceiling Act came into being, tenurial issues remain vague and so there is no security of livelihood. Clarity regarding ownership status is missing. In the past dispensation, there was a proliferation of informal cooperatives but capital crises forced the fishworkers of various bheris to lease them out to leaseholders. This led to further complications.
2. In order to rationalise this problem, choosing bheris for de-siltation may employ the following criteria:
  - a. Have a number of fishworkers employed in the bheri, depending on it fully or partially for their livelihood.
  - b. Has a secure source of supply of sewage.
  - c. Willing to maintain good production practices for a period of five years at least after the re-excavation work has been done.
  - d. Willing to provide written consent to work.

The number of workers engaged per bheri may range from 10 to 150, and the size range will be from 5 acres to 125 acres. The work will be easier to do in phases, with say 20 bheries being targeted in the first phase. If it is decided to start the work, identification of the bheries can be specifically done by a chosen organization.



### Some facts about the support needed

The excavation needs to be done by JCB, with pond bottom treatment taking quite some time (say 2 -3 months) for bheries which have not been excavated in a long time, even up to 20 years. Thereafter, fish fingerlings or eggs will have to be supplied to the bheri. But the task does not end here. For the next 3 – 3.5 months, one cannot expect a crop to be market-ready. For that time, fish workers engaged in the bheri will have to be trained and do some mixed farming practices to increase the productivity of the bheri, for which support will be essential. This will enable a quicker turnaround of the bheri. On their part, bheri owners, leaseholders and informal co-operative operators will have to monetise a portion of their labour, according to ability. This will ensure joint participation in the bheri desiltation work.