

## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### 1 Background

Lakes are an important feature of the Earth's ecosystem. Lakes<sup>1</sup> are transitional areas between dry terrestrial and permanent aquatic ecosystems. They provide a wide diversity of values and uses such as for supply of water, food, fodder, fuel, fishery, aquaculture, timber production, transport, ecotourism, culture and heritage, research and educational values, *etc.* Lakes, in general, have the characteristics such as catchment area for water run-off/catchment drainage system, foreshore region, wetland formation with aquatic vegetation, water spread area with flora and fauna, bund for supporting storage of water, waste weir for excess outflow of water, *etc.* There are 36,568 lakes/tanks in Karnataka<sup>2</sup>, which are under the control of various authorities.

Due to rapid urbanisation and change in land use pattern, the lake areas including catchment areas have been encroached in many cases. This led to reduced inflow of water into lakes, thereby resulting in numerous lakes being lost over the years. Many lakes have lost even their original characteristics. Some of the prominent lakes that have lost their characteristics are given in **Appendix 1**.

Owing to the above reasons, the State Government felt the necessity to constitute (July 1985) an expert committee (headed by Shri. N. Lakshman Rau, IAS (Retired)) to look into various aspects relating to preservation and restoration of the existing lakes/tanks. The Committee, *inter alia*, recommended that efforts should be made to ensure that these lakes are not breached but retained as water bodies. Lakes should not be polluted by discharge of sewage, effluent and industrial wastes; off-shore area of lakes should be protected and suitable areas adjoining the lakes should be earmarked for recreational and tourism activities. They also recommended the construction of more tanks along the natural valleys which have a run-off. The State Government accepted (1988) the recommendations made by the Committee. Important recommendations of this Committee are mentioned in **Appendix 2**. The State Government also constituted (July 2002) the Lake Development Authority (LDA) registered under the Societies Act to regulate and monitor the conservation, rejuvenation and restoration of lakes.

Despite the above measures, encroachments and pollution in lakes could not be contained, leading to several public interest litigations. The Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka, as part of its proceedings, appointed (November 2010) a Committee headed by Justice N.K. Patil and officers from the State Government as members, to examine the ground realities and prepare an

<sup>1</sup> A publication by Shri. Pratap K. Mohanty, Department of Marine Sciences, Berhampur University, Berhampur, Orissa

<sup>2</sup> A study report submitted to Infrastructure Development Department, Government of Karnataka by Infrastructure Development Corporation (Karnataka) Limited to assess the feasibility of conserving lakes in Karnataka

action plan for restoration and preservation of lakes. The Committee prepared a strategic plan for various entities to restore lakes in terms of the decision of the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka in Writ Petition No.817/2008. Based on the decision of the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka (April 2012), the State Government constituted (May 2013) various committees including an Apex Committee to monitor the conservation and restoration works of lakes.