Proposed water aerodrome in Chilika Lake likely to face green hurdle

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The Airports Authority of India has proposed to set up a water aerodrome in Chilika Lake for starting amphibious aircraft operations in Odisha.

A pre-feasibility study has already been completed. The Chilika Development Authority, the apex regulatory authority for Chilika Lake, has been asked to submit its opinion about the project.

“We have received a proposal regarding setting up of a water aerodrome in Chilika Lake. We are evaluating the possible ecological consequences of the project. We will soon submit our opinion,” said Suhanta Nanda, Chief Executive of the Chilika Development Authority.

Sources, however, said the project will most likely face a green hurdle. “For six months between October and March, Chilika turns into a temporary habitat for lakhs of migratory and residential birds. If an aircraft flies at low height, there is every chance of the birds getting hit. While the bird population will be in danger, safety of passengers of amphibious aircraft will also be jeopardised,” a senior officer said.

Noise pollution generated by close to 10,000 boats has already taken a toll on the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins in the lake. The amphibious aircraft operation would add to the woes.

As many as 155 endangered Irrawaddy dolphins were spotted in Chilika, which is the single largest habitat of this species in the world. After clearing the lake of illegal man-made enclosures, dolphins have now started moving freely in all sectors.

Meanwhile, the Odisha government has decided to regulate boat operation in the lake following the death of six passengers in a recent boat tragedy. It has made life jackets mandatory for tourists and GPS on the boats.