

9. ROLE OF SETTLEMENT OFFICER

As per Section 18B of the Wildlife [Protection] Act, 1972, Sub Collector/RDO Devikulam has been appointed as the Settlement Officer to settle the claims, if any, of the occupant farmers within the territorial limits of the notified area. It is reported that, efforts made by the Sub Collectors/RDOs went in vain due to “the protests by the occupants” who seldom were ready to prove their claim over the lands, before the notified authority so far, nor allowing others interested to establish their claims. The legal and eligible small assignees could really have no objection. In fact, it would be in their interest to get their documents and holdings verified. It is the illegal holders who have got the lands illegally transferred to their names from the pattayam holders, who would have objection as their wrong-doings would then get detected. The illegal holders have strong vested interest to continue to hold these lands and to enjoy the fruits of these lands. They lie in sly wait to get a chance wrong mutation done on the basis of a Power of Attorney, transfer and carry out further sale of such illegally held lands. The extent of misdoings is indeed mind-boggling. It is these illegal holders who are behind the so-called 'protests' and have been allowed to hold the system to ransom. All the efforts of the Government to settle the claims are, therefore, at a standstill.

The directions from this Committee could not be followed by the Survey Department and no progress on ground to survey the area could be made, as the survey teams that have gone for verification to the site claim their work was disrupted on the third day in succession, instigated from known and unknown powerful quarters making the efforts practically impossible to deal with. Copy of letter from Director, Survey & Land Records is at **Annexure VII**.