

MINUTES OF MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN GHATS REGION HELD ON 03.08.2015 UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP BY MOS (IC) (E,F & CC)

1. A Meeting was held under the chairmanship of Minister of State (Independent Charge), Environment, Forest, and Climate Change on 03.08.2015 with Members of Parliament of Western Ghats region. The list of MPs who participated in the meeting is given in Annexure I. The Hon'ble Union Cabinet Minister, Heavy Industries & Public Sector Enterprises, Government of India and Hon'ble Minister of State Road Transport and Highways and Shipping, Government of India also participated in the meeting.

2. The Hon'ble MEF&CC in his opening remarks welcomed the Hon'ble Members of Parliament to the meeting on Western Ghats.

3. Shri Hem Pande, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change gave a brief presentation on the issues related with Western Ghats conservation which *inter alia* included (i) the importance of Western Ghats both in terms of the rich biodiversity it harbours and its importance as origin of major rivers of peninsular India, (ii) large human population of around 50 million people reside in the Western Ghats and therefore sustainable development of the region is required, (iii) a brief overview about constitution of Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) and High Level Working Group (HLWG), (iv) the salient findings of HLWG including demarcation of Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA), the projects/activities to be regulated / prohibited in the ESA, (v) the draft notification published in the Gazette of India on 10th March 2014 declaring ecologically sensitive area in the Western Ghats, (vi) demarcation of ESA by physical verification by the State Governments of the Western Ghats region, (vii) the misapprehensions and concerns of the local people with respect to ESA, and (viii) the concept of ESA.

4. After the presentation, the Hon'ble MEF&CC said that India has 2.5 % of the land area of the world but supports 17 % of the human population, highest cattle population and has only 4 % of world's fresh water resources. This puts pressure on the country's resources and also sets up the developments imperatives. It is in this context the concept of sustainable

development needs to be followed. He emphasized that the forests needs to be preserved while allowing for sustainable development.

Specifically, with respect to the exercise of demarcation of ESA by physical verification , Hon'ble MEF&CC informed that the Ministry has received proposals from the State Governments' of Kerala and Goa regarding demarcation of ESA by physical verification. This was subsequent to the meeting of the State Environment and Forest Ministers held on 7th July 2015 under his Chairmanship in New Delhi. He further mentioned that the Forest Minister, Government of Karnataka has informed that the state's proposal has been sent to the Ministry but the same had not been received as yet.

5. He also mentioned that the local people residing in the Western Ghats have a fear that their agricultural practices would be closed and their livelihood would be affected by declaration of the ESA in Western Ghats. He clarified to the MPs of the Western Ghats region that as per the draft notification only five categories of projects/activities would be prohibited in the proposed ESA. These activities have the maximum interventionist and destructive impact on ecosystems. He emphasized that nothing substantial is going to change within the ESA in Western Ghats and the local people can continue to practice their livelihoods and day to day activities. There would be no dislocation of people living in the ESA. He further observed that all the suggestions emerging from the meeting would be considered and any changes proposed would be taken up after consultation only.

6. At the outset all the MPs appreciated the initiative of the Hon'ble MEF&CC to call a meeting of the elected representatives of the Western Ghats for understanding the issues related to the declaration of ecologically sensitive area in the Western Ghats. During the meeting, Shri Shashi Tharoor, Member Parliament, stated that as 25 Members of Parliament of Indian National Congress have been suspended from the Lok Sabha, it would not be proper for them to participate in the meeting. The Hon'ble MEF&CC requested the Members of Parliament to stay in the meeting and express their views / suggestions on the important topic.

7. The main points/issues raised by MPs are summarized below in a state-wise manner. This includes the views put forth by the Hon'ble Union Minister Heavy Industries & Public

Sector Enterprises and Ministers of State for Road Transport and Highways and Shipping, Government of India on the issues related to the draft notification declaring ecologically sensitive area in the Western Ghats and the concerns of the local people.

A. Maharashtra

- (i) The Western Ghats should be preserved and the environment needs to be protected while doing so it should not be forgotten that human beings are also part of the system.
- (ii) Earlier the moratorium imposed on consideration of grant of Environment Clearance to various projects/activities under the EIA Notification, 2006 in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg Districts of Maharashtra for nearly five years had taken back the konkan region and stopped development of the region. This ban was lifted by the Hon'ble MEF&CC based upon the recommendations of the HLWG which has provided significant relief to the local people as the extraction of laterite stone for house construction purposes was also stopped due to the moratorium. The moratorium was lifted from nearly 960 villages of the Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg Districts
- (iii) It was emphasized that the most important step towards conservation of forest of the Konkan region is to stop theft and smuggling of forest produce.
- (iv) With reference to the projects/activities proposed to be prohibited in the ESA, it was highlighted that the sand mining and quarrying activities have been prohibited in the ESA. This would seriously impact the local people and slow down development projects. It was emphasized that sand and laterite stone is required by the local people for building of houses and development works. The Government of Maharashtra has recently allowed sand mining based upon permit basis. As there is no clarity on the ground with respect to the applicability of regulations in the ESA, the Collectors of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg District are not issuing any permissions for the same. This has resulted in unauthorized mining of sand and laterite stone. Due to the absence of authorized mining the prices of both these commodities have increased rapidly. The condition is particularly more serious in the Konkan region comprising of Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg Districts. Hence, there is an urgent need to stop unauthorized mining.
- (v) It was also highlighted that the delimitation of ESA needs to be looked into more critically and this should be related to ground reality. There is a feeling among local

people that permission would be required to repair houses and that the farmers would be stopped to build houses on their land.

- (vi) The construction of roads should be allowed in the ESA such as the road joining NH – 66 to NH – 4 may be allowed in the ESA.
- (vii) Red category of industries especially chemical industries which generate hazardous waste should not be allowed in the ESA. The discharge of effluents from these industries have led to fish loss in water bodies of Western Ghats.
- (viii) Nuclear power plants should also not be allowed in the ESA. Hydel power projects is better option for generation of electricity.
- (ix) In the already declared Matheran Eco-sensitive Zone in Western Ghats the local people face immense difficulty even in construction of their houses. Due to the stringent provisions of the notification the practice of hand cart pulling is still being practiced in the Matheran.

B. Goa

- (i) The eco-sensitive Zones around Protected Areas have already been declared by the Central Government. The State Government had set up three Committees for undertaking demarcation of ESAs by physical verification. Based upon the physical verification there are 19 complete villages which fall in the ESA.
- (ii) Due to lack of clarity on the regulatory provisions which are applicable in the proposed ESA area, the Collectors of Districts are not granting permissions for routine works.
- (iii) One of the prime concerns with respect to the draft notification is that there should be no dislocation of the local people.

C. Karnataka

- (i) It was brought to the notice of the members that the Government of Karnataka had not undertaken demarcation of ESA by physical verification instead a cabinet sub-committee was constituted for holding interaction with stakeholders at various places. As such, the report submitted by Government of Karnataka is not based upon actual physical survey. Therefore, ample time should be given to undertake physical survey.

- (ii) The proposed blanket ban on sand mining and quarrying should not be imposed in the ESA as it affects development works and construction projects. The cost of sand has increased manifold due to this.
- (iii) The Arecanut, Coffee and Rubber Plantations in the Western Ghats region of Karnataka are covered under the green land use category and they should not be affected through the regulation of the draft notification.

D. Kerala

- (i) The demarcation of ESA done by HLWG was based upon satellite survey and areas of plantation, agriculture and habitations have been wrongly included in the ESA demarcated by HLWG.
- (ii) The ESA demarcated by HLWG includes area of high population density even though HLWG had stated that areas with population density of less than 100 people/sq. Km. would be only considered for ESA. It was pointed out that the nearly 23 lakhs people live in the Western Ghats region in Kerala and that the average population density of the state is 360 people/sq.km. The forest cover of Kerala is 27 % which is well above the national average of 21 %. Thus Kerala should have a special dispensation.
- (iii) The spot study of ESA done by Prof Oommen V Oommen Committee and the demarcation on cadastral map done by the village level committee should be accepted.
- (iv) The history of the demarcation of ESA in Western Ghats needs to be analyzed. In 2006, a nomination was submitted to the UNESCO for inscribing Western Ghats as World Natural Heritage site *inter alia* one of the criteria was to undertake such a decision in a participatory manner, which was never done. In 2009, the nomination developed by Wildlife Institute of India, and 2 NGOs one of which being ATREE, was resubmitted to UNESCO. Again no consultations were held. The World Heritage Committee deferred the consideration of the resubmitted nomination dossier of India regarding inscription of Western Ghats as World Heritage sites in 2011. Then

WGEEP undertook skewed consultations for the purpose of satisfying international agenda. It was stated that by this we are promoting environmental colonialism supported by foreign funding which will lead to generation of conservation refugees.

- (v) The WGEEP and HLWG lacked people's participation therefore they should be scrapped and a new initiative with peoples participation should be taken up. The earlier notification should be withdrawn or otherwise habitations, agriculture and plantations be excluded from the identified ESA. Further, Hospital, slaughter house and oil extraction unit should be exempted from the list of industries which are prohibited in the ESA.
- (vi) It was also pointed out that in Kerala there are no villages. As such, all the villages have been transformed into townships and due to the draft notification the land value has gone down. The local people residing in the ESA are afraid of the forest officials.
- (vii) It was stressed that human beings are part of environment and therefore it is important to protect the livelihood of human beings as well and that people should not be disturbed in the ESA and that status quo shall be maintained. As a specific example of Cardomom Hill Reserve which is in the Western Ghats was explained.
- (viii) One view was also expressed that the substance of Gadgil report needs to be accepted while protecting the livelihood needs of the local people and that these two are not mutually exclusive. We need to protect industry as well as flora and fauna. Activity can continue but in a regulated manner. The Gadgil report states that public participation is required.
- (ix) It was also stated that farmers of the region are for protection of environment. However, environmental protection cannot be a bureaucratic exercise this needs to be achieved by broader debate and environmental awareness programmes.

E. Tamil Nadu

- (i) The Western Ghats is a unique gift of nature. Therefore, the Central Government constituted two committees to study the same area. No destructive activity should be carried out in the area, otherwise the Courts would intervene just as the Supreme Court did in the case of Goa where mining was closed down.
- (ii) Declaration of ESA should not create a hurdle for roads and railway development projects. In the ESA activities such as plantation of medicinal plants and setting up cottage industries should be promoted.
- (iii) Both WGEEP and HLWG established for demarcation of ESA have not visited the areas. Without visiting the areas on the ground how could these Committees identify the ecologically sensitive areas. Therefore, a special committee should be formed to visit the areas and listen to the local people.

8. In the end, the Hon'ble MEF&CC observed that human beings are important component in all environment conservation efforts. He also clarified that habitations, plantations and agriculture will not be affected in the ESA. Hon'ble MEF&CC re-emphasized that nothing substantial affecting the local people and their livelihoods and day to day activities will change within the ESA in Western Ghats and apprehensions in this regard are not well founded. There would be no dislocation of people living in the ESA. He also stated that the suggestion of Hon'ble MPs for regulating sand mining for local use in ESA has been noted. He emphasized that the highly polluting industries will not be allowed in the ESA. Finally, the Hon'ble MEF&CC thanked all the MPs for their participation in the meeting and for sharing their views on the subject.

ANNEXURE

**List of participating Members of Parliament of Western Ghats region in the Meeting
Chaired by Hon'ble Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on 3rd
August 2015 at 3.00 PM in Parliament House**

Sl. No.	Name
	Lok Sabha
1.	Shri Shrirang Appa Barne
2.	Dr. Heena Vijay kumar Gavit
3.	Shri Anant Gangaram Geete, Union Cabinet Minister, Heavy Industries & Public Sector Enterprises, Government of India
4.	Shri Vinayak Bhaurao Raut
5.	Shri Anil Shirole
6.	Shri Pon Radhakrishnan Hon'ble Minister of State Road Transport and Highways and Shipping, Government of India
7.	Shri Anto Antony,
8.	Shri (Adv.) Joice George
9.	Shri C.NO.Jayadevan
10.	Shri Jose K. Mani.
11.	Shri N.K. Premachandran
12.	Shri M.K. Raghavan
13.	Shri M.I. Shanavas
14.	Dr. Shashi Tharoor
15.	Km. Shobha Karandlaje
16.	Shri Nalin Kumar Kateel
17.	Shri Prathap Simha
18.	Shri Shripad Yesso Naik
19.	Shri Advocate Narendra Keshav Sawaikar
20.	Shri Kodikunnil Suresh
21.	Shri Mullappally Ramachandran

Sl. No.	Name
22.	Shri Dilip Kumar Mansukhlal Gandhi
	<i>Rajya Sabha</i>
23.	Shri S. Thangavelu
24.	Shri Joy Abraham
25.	Shri C.P. Narayanan
26.	Shri K.K. Ragesh
27.	Shri K. N. Balagopal
28.	Shri Suresh C Augundi
29.	Shri Hussain Dalwai

Officers of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

1. Shri Ashok Lavasa, Secretary,
2. Shri Hem Pande, Addl. Secretary
3. Dr. T. Chandni, Advisor
4. Shri Vinay Srivastava, PS to HMEFCC
5. Shri Lalit Kapur, Director
6. Dr. Amit Love, Scientist 'D'
7. Shri Arvind Shukla, Technical Officer
