

**Minutes of the Meeting of Hon'ble Minister (EF& CC) with the Hon'ble Members of Parliament of Western Ghats Region held on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2016 at 18.00 Hrs in IP Bhawan, Jor Bagh, New Delhi**

1. A meeting chaired by Hon'ble Minister (EF&CC) was held on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2016 with Hon'ble Members of Parliament of the Western Ghats Region to discuss the Draft Notification dated 4<sup>th</sup> September 2015 for declaring eco-sensitive area in Western Ghats. The List of Hon'ble Member of Parliament and officers of MOEF&CC who participated in the meeting is Annexed.

2. While welcoming the Members of Parliament, Hon'ble Minister (EF&CC) stated that environmental protection and development can coexist together in the region and there should be a balance between ecology and development. Hon'ble MEF further stated that the conservation of the Western Ghats is of vital importance and needs to be conserved for future generations.

3. A detailed presentation on the Western Ghats was made by Adviser (ESZ). The presentation highlighted the significance of Western Ghats and the background of proposed notification of Ecological Sensitive Area of the Western Ghats region. The Ministry while issuing a fresh draft notification dated 4<sup>th</sup> September 2015 had attempted to resolve the apprehensions/concerns expressed by the State Governments and various stakeholders of Western Ghats relating to issues concerning (i) habitation, (ii) plantation, (iii) agriculture, (iv) change in existing land use, and (v) displacement/dislocation of local people, etc. Provisions had been inserted to clarify that nothing substantial is going to change in terms of livelihood within the ESA in Western Ghats, as there would be no dislocation of people living in the ESA. However, highly polluting industries categorised as 'RED' by the Central Pollution Control Board, thermal power plants and commercial mining, based on their highly destructive potential and

potentially grave impacts on the environment, especially on the eco-fragile areas of Western Ghats, would be prohibited in the ESAs. In addition, very large construction projects (of 20,000 sq. metres area and above) and townships (an area of 50 ha and above and/or with built up area of 1,50,000 sq. metres and above) would also be prohibited. All the other developmental activities would be regulated vide existing laws and regulations including the EIA Notification, Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

4. The Report of High-Level Working Group (HLWG) headed by Dr.K. Kasturirangan was sent to the State Governments of all the six States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala for undertaking the exercise of demarcating ESA by physical verification. Reports received from Kerala, Maharashtra indicated that the as an essential criterion of contiguity for conservation had been changed by demarcating ESA at sub-village level and also leaving out areas at lower elevation and excluding areas with higher human population (cultural landscape), resulting in fragmenting of the areas identified as eco-sensitive. The details of judicial intervention of Hon'ble NGT, Principal Bench Delhi dated 14.02.2016 were also presented.

5. After the presentation, Hon'ble Minister opened the floor for discussion. Most of Hon'ble Members of Parliament expressed various concerns relating to the Draft Notification and stated that there were still apprehensions on the declaration of ESA leading to curtailment of development in the region.

6. Shri Sharad Pawar (MP (RS) welcomed the initiative of convening the meeting and sought details of the Kasturirangan report and of the draft notification and the areas/districts proposed as ESA.

7. Shri Joice George, MP (LS) mentioned that the Gadgil report has assigned three levels of Ecological Sensitivity to different regions of the Western Ghats and recommended no new polluting industries in Ecologically Sensitive Zones 1 and 2. He further stated that absolute prohibition of 'RED' category industries also includes establishment of Hospitals, which should be exempted in the Eco-sensitive Area. He stated that the directions dated 13<sup>th</sup> November 2013 issued by MoEF&CC under Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 has resulted in the States not issuing clearance for such activities.

8. Shri Shashi Tharoor (MP (LS) stated that instead of choosing a prohibitory/restrictive approach, we should opt for a regulatory/incentive-based mechanism to promote sustainable development while conserving the Western Ghats.

9. Shri Jose K Mani (MP (LS) described about private and privileged forest and stated that areas under agriculture and plantation should be deleted from Eco-sensitive Area.

10. Shri A. K. Hedge (MP) (LS) elaborated the difficulties in following the prohibited and regulated activities under modern day's vision of development. He also raised concerns regarding the concept of Protected Areas, Cultural Landscape and Carrying Capacity and the industries to be promoted in the ESAs.

11. It was stated that the Pronab Sen Committee Report for declaring ESAs has emphasised that such an exercise should be undertaken with utmost caution ensuring that the region's economy is not affected.

12. Shri A. Sampath (MP (LS) sought clarification on the extent of areas to be notified under ESA.

13. Shri C. P. Narayanan (MP) (RS) stated that road connectivity is very important even in ESAs. He further stated that many villages have high population density and would be affected by declaration of ESA.

14. Shri Dilip Gandhi (MP) (LS) sought a clarification whether the proposed line of action to be followed by GOI is to be based on Madhav Gadgil Report or Kasturirangan Report. It was also mentioned that areas not included in the Kasturirangan Report in Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg require being included in the ESA for the protection of the Ghats Area. However, the HLWG Report has not included such areas. He mentioned about the predominant stone mining in the Devgad area and that people of Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg have supported ESA to protect the Ghats area. He stated that in order to avoid landslides in the Amboli Ghat and to cut short the distance the Kohlapur- Sindhudurg Road in the Ecologically Sensitive Area, road connectivity is a necessity for the inclusive development of villagers in the region.

15. Shri Anto Antony (MP) (LS) stated that most of the 123 villages of Kerala included in the ESA have a very high population and should be exempted and Kerala is already taking a number of measures for conserving nature.

16. A concern was raised that forest dwellers should not be asked to relocate upon declaration of ESA as this could lead to socio-economic problems. Several Members desired that the Ministry may discuss the matter further with State Governments and also have further discussion with them for finalising the draft notification.

17. Shri Joy Abraham mentioned that the Ministry should protect the States from the judicial intervention. He also mentioned that an impartial

view may be taken on the Notification of the ESA based on the endorsement of the State Government of Kerala and the views of the MPs.

18. Smt P.K Teacher (MP) (LS) stated that the notification should protect the nature without affecting peoples' livelihood and the Centre may discuss the matter with State Governments.

19. Shri Truchi Siva (MP) (RS) stated that conservation measures were important and plastic container/bags should be avoided in protected areas. He also mentioned about the aerial seeding for large scale plantation should be promoted.

20. Hon'ble Minister appreciated the participation of the Members of Parliament and their views and suggestions. He emphasised that different states have problems of a different nature and those need to be addressed accordingly. He requested the Members for sharing their views in writing. He also requested that good development models may be proposed for further consideration. Hon'ble Minister further elaborated that there should be balance between habitat, forests and society. He stated that the draft Notification dated 4<sup>th</sup> September 2015 would be the basis for taking the way forward through a consultative process with State Governments, and various stakeholders including local people, NGOs, etc within the next few months, based on which the Draft Notification would be finalised.

20. The meeting ended with a Vote of Thanks to the Chair.

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**List of Hon'ble Members of Parliament Participated the Meeting of Hon'ble Minister (EF& CC) with the Hon'ble Members of Parliament of Western Ghats Region held on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2016**

<b>S N</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>House (Rajya Sabha/Lok Sabha)</b>
1	Shri Sharad Pawar	RS (Maharashtra)
2	Shri Joice George	LS (Kerala) (Idukki)
3	Shri K Soma Prasad	RS (Kerala)
4	Shri Joy Abraham	RS (Kerala)
5	Shri C P Narayanan	RS (Kerala)
6	Shri Vinayak Bhaurao Raut	LS (Ratnagiri-Sindudurg) Maharashtra)
7	Smt. P.K Shrimati Teacher	LS (Kerala)
8	Shri Nalin Kumar Kateel	LS (Karnataka) (Dakshina Kannada)
9	Shri Anant Kumar Hedge	LS (Karnataka) (Uttara Kannada)
10	Dr. Shashi Tharoor	LS (Kerala) (Thiruvananthapuram)
11	Dr. A Sampath	LS (Kerala) (Attingal)
12	Shri Anto Antony	LS (Kerala) (Pathanamthitta)
13	Shri Jose K Mani	LS (Kerala) (Kottayam)
14	Shri Dilip Gandhi	LS (Maharashtra)(Ahmednagar)
15	Shri Tiruchi Siva	RS (Tamil Nadu)
16	Shri Oscar Fernandes	RS (Karnataka)

<b>Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&amp;CC)</b>	
17	Shri Ajay Narayan Jha, Secretary, MoEF&CC
18	Dr. Sharad Singh Negi, DG, Forest &SS, MoEF&CC
19	Dr. Amita Prasad, Additional Secretary, MoEF&CC
20	Dr. S.K. Khanduri, IGF (WL)
21	Shri D.K. Sinha, IGF (FC)
22	Shri Gyanesh Bharti, JS, MoEF&CC
23	Shri M.K.Singh, JS, MOEF&CC
24	Dr. J.R. Bhatt, Advisor, MoEF&CC
25	Dr.Sujata Arora, Advisor, MoEF&CC

26	Dr.R.Dalwani, Advisor, MoEF&CC
27	Dr. T. Chandini, Sci. G/Advisor, MoEF&CC
28	Dr.Subrata Bose, Additional Director, MoEF&CC

**National Biodiversity Authority**

29.	Dr.B. Meenakumari, Chairperson, National Biodiversity Authority, Chennai
30.	Dr.T. Rabikumar, Member-Secretary, National Biodiversity Authority, Chennai