



PRESS STATEMENT

MoEF announces Establishment of Expert Panel on Western Ghats

New Delhi, 4th February 2010: The Ministry of Environment and Forests today announced the constitution of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel. This Panel has been established to recommend measures and to assist the Government in the preservation, conservation and rejuvenation of this environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant region.

The first task of the Panel will be to assess the current status of the ecology of the Western Ghats region and to demarcate areas within the region which should be earmarked for notification as ecologically sensitive zones under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

It has been estimated that the Western Ghats neutralise 4 million tons of carbon, equivalent to 14 million tons of CO₂ annually. This is about 10% of the total greenhouse gas emissions neutralised by India's forests. Also given the complex interstate nature of its geography, as well as the rich biodiversity value of the region, it was felt that the establishment of an Expert Panel composed of professional members and dedicated specifically to the task of reviewing, implementing and recommending measures for their protection was essential to ensuring the long term survival of the Western Ghats region.

The 14 member panel shall be chaired by Prof. Madhav Gadgil and shall furnish its report to the Ministry of Environment and Forests within six months from the date of its constitution, following a comprehensive consultation process involving people and Governments of all the concerned States.

The Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh has also called a meeting today of 43 Members of Parliament representing the 51 districts through which the Western Ghats run in the six states (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat). This parliamentary group of Western Ghats MPs shall meet regularly to take stock of issues concerning the ecology and the sustainable development of the region.

A link has also been provided on the Ministry's home page (www.moef.nic.in) to the Keystone Foundation website where a 'fly through' overview (utilizing google earth technologies) of the region is available.

No.1/1/2010- RE (ESZ)
Government of India
Ministry of Environment & Forests
(RE Division)

Paryavaran Bhavan,
CGO Complex, Lodi Road,
New Delhi – 110 003

Dated: March 4, 2010

OFFICE ORDER

Sub: Constitution of Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel

1. The Western Ghats region runs to a length of 1600 kilometers starting from the mouth of the river Tapti near the border of Gujarat and Maharashtra to Kanyakumari, the southern-most tip of India in Tamil Nadu covering six states namely; Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat (portions of Dang Forests). The region covers an area of about 1.60 lac square kilometers.
2. The Western Ghats Region generally receives 500 mm to 7000 mm of rainfall. Most of the rivers in peninsular India have their origin in Western Ghats of which Godavari, Krishna, Kaveri, Kali Nadi and Periyar are of inter – state importance. These water resources have been harnessed for irrigation and power. About 30% of the area of the Western Ghats Region is under forests. The region is also a treasure house of plant and animal life. The Western Ghats is one of the four Biodiversity hotspots of the country. The region harbors 1,741 species of flowering plants and 403 species of birds. Notable wildlife includes the tiger, elephant, the Indian bison, lion-tailed macaque, wynaad laughing thrush, Travancore tortoise, uropeltid snakes, several species of legless amphibians and dipterocarp trees.
3. The traditional horticultural crops in the region are arecanut, pepper and cardamom in the hills and coconuts in the coast along with mango and jack fruit. Tea, coffee, rubber, cashew and tapioca are the other important plantation crops of the region. This region has one of the world's highest concentrations of wild relatives of cultivated plants. Some of the National parks situated in this region are the Borivali National Park, Nagarhole National Park, Bandipur National Park, Annamalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Periyar National Park, etc.
4. The ecological and environmental problems of the area include increasing pressure of population and industry including tourism on land and vegetation; submergence of forest areas under river valley projects, encroachment on forest lands; mining operations, clear felling of natural forests for raising tea, coffee, rubber, eucalyptus, wattle and other monoculture plantations; infrastructural

projects such as railway lines and roads, soil erosion, land slides; habitat fragmentation and rapidly declining biodiversity.

5. Given the environmental sensitivity and ecological significance of the region and the complex interstate nature of its geography, as well as the possible impacts of climate change on this region, it is proposed to constitute a Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel.

6. The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel is hereby constituted with the following members for a period of one year from the date of issue of this order, namely:-

1. Prof. Madhav Gadgil
Ex-Chairman, Centre for Ecological Sciences,
Indian Institute of Science,
A-18, Spring Flowers, Panchavati
Pashan Road
Pune – 411 008,
Maharashtra. Chairman
2. Shri B.J. Krishnan
Senior Advocate,
Nilgiris Centre, Hospital Road,
Ootacamund - 643001
Tamil Nadu. Member
3. Dr. Nandkumar Mukund Kamat,
Assistant Professor,
Department of Botany,
Goa University,
Goa. Member
4. Dr. K.N. Ganeshaiyah
Ashok Trust for Research in Ecology & Environment
(ATREE),
659 5th A Main, Hebbal
Bengaluru - 560 024, Karnataka. Member
5. Dr. V.S. Vijayan
Chairman,
Kerala Biodiversity Board,
Pallimukku, Pettah P. O.
Thiruvananthapuram - 695 024
Kerala. Member
(ex-officio)

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| 6. | Prof. (Ms.) Renee Borges
Centre for Ecological Sciences,
Indian Institute of Science (IISC),
Bengaluru – 560 012, Karnataka. | Member |
| 7. | Prof. R. Sukumar,
Chairman, Centre for Ecological Sciences,
Indian Institute of Science (IISc),
Bengaluru – 560 012, Karnataka. | Member |
| 8. | Dr. Ligia Noronha
Director (Resources & Global Security Division),
The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI),
Darbari Block, India Habitat Centre,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi – 110 003. | Member |
| 9. | Ms Vidya S. Nayak
Nagarika Seva Trust,
Gurvayankere - 574 217,
Belthangadi Taluk,
Dakshina Kannada District, Karnataka. | Member |
| 10. | Dr. D. K. Subramaniam
Professor of Computer Science and Automation,
and Ecological Sciences, IISc, Bengaluru (Retd)
Foundation for Advancement of Education and Research
G5, Swiss Complex, 33, Race Course Road
Bengaluru – 560 001, Karnataka. | Member |
| 11. | Dr. P.L. Gautam
Chairman, National Biodiversity Authority (NBA)
5th Floor, TICEL Bio Park,
Taramani Road, Taramani,
Chennai - 600 113, Tamil Nadu. | Member
(ex-officio) |
| 12. | Prof. S.P. Gautam
Chairman, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)
Parivesh Bhavan, CBD-Cum-Office Complex,
East Arjun Nagar, Delhi – 110 032. | Member
(ex-officio) |
| 13. | Dr. R.R. Navalgund
Director, Space Application Centre (SAC),
Ahmedabad – 380 015 Gujarat. | Member
(ex-officio) |

14. Dr. G.V. Subrahmanyam
Advisor (RE), Ministry of Environment &
Forests, Government of India, New Delhi.

Member-Secretary
(ex-officio)

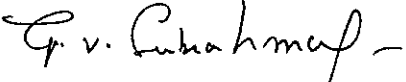
7. The Panel shall perform, the following functions, namely:-
- (i) to assess the current status of ecology of the Western Ghats region.
 - (ii) to demarcate areas within the Western Ghats Region which need to be notified as ecologically sensitive and to recommend for notification of such areas as ecologically sensitive zones under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. In doing so, the Panel shall review the existing reports such as the Pronab Sen Committee report and Dr. T. S. Vijayraghvan Committee Report, Hon'ble Supreme Court's directions, Recommendations of the National Board for Wildlife and consult all concerned State Governments.
 - (iii) to make recommendations for the conservation, protection and rejuvenation of the Western Ghats Region following a comprehensive consultation process involving people and Governments of all the concerned States.
 - (iv) to suggest measures for effective implementation of the notifications issued by the Government of India in the Ministry of Environment and Forests declaring specific areas in the Western Ghats Region as Eco-sensitive zones under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
 - (v) to recommend the modalities for the establishment of Western Ghats Ecology Authority under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 which will be a professional body to manage the ecology of the region and to ensure its sustainable development with the support of all concerned states.
 - (vi) to deal with any other relevant environment and ecological issues pertaining to Western Ghats Region, including those which may be referred to it by the Central Government in the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
8. The Panel may co-opt any other expert(s) /official (s), if necessary, for taking requisite inputs, with the permission of the Chair.
9. The Panel shall furnish its report to the Central Government through the Ministry of Environment and Forests within six months from the date of its constitution. Additional submissions, if any, may be submitted after this period.

10. The Panel shall have its meetings at Delhi or at any other place within India as decided by the Chair.

11. The TA/DA of non-official members, including co-opted members, if any, for attending the meetings of the Panel and for undertaking site visits, if any, will be met by the Ministry of Environment & Forests as per rules.

12. The non-official members, including co-opted members, if any, are entitled for a sitting fee of Rs. 1000/- per day during the meetings of the Panel.

13. This issues with the approval of the Competent Authority and with the concurrence of the Integrated Finance Division of this Ministry, vide their U.O. Note Dy. No. 407/AS & FA / F/10 dated 04-03-2010.


(Dr. G.V. Subrahmanyam)
Adviser (RE)

To

All Members

Copy to:

1. Pay & Accounts Officer, Principal Pay & Accounts Office, Ministry of Environment & Forests, New Delhi.
2. IFD/B& A Section, Ministry of Environment & Forests.
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