

**Minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA) held on 25.3.11 under the chairmanship of Secretary (E&F) Dr. T. Chatterjee, Ministry of Environment & Forests, New Delhi**

The first meeting of the CWRA was held on 25.3.11 at 1500 hrs. under the chairmanship of Secretary (E&F), Dr. T. Chatterjee. The list of participants is annexed. Representative from Tourism Department and one expert from the field of Limnology could not attend the meeting due to various reasons.

The Chairman in his introductory remarks welcomed all the members of the newly constituted Central Wetland Authority. He emphasized that wetlands play a vital role in charging of aquifers and as such these should not be used beyond their carrying capacities. He was appreciative of the fact that the wetland regulatory mechanism has been established for the first time in the country in pursuance of National Environmental Policy (2006) resolutions under which a disciplinary expert group was constituted which held series of meetings to formulate draft regulatory framework for the wetlands which was put up on website twice to get inputs from all concerned. After incorporating feedback from all the draft was sent to Ministry of Legal Affairs for vetting. After vetting notification came into being on 4.12.10 under Environment Protection Act, 1986. He was sure that the regulation will certainly ensure better conservation and management and will prevent further degradation of wetlands in the country.

Thereafter he asked all members to introduce themselves. He was of the view for an integrated approach for wetland conservation. **Taking into consideration the multi-disciplinary nature of the programme, he announced merger of all the three schemes related to wetlands viz. National Wetland Conservation Programme, Programme Conservation of Mangrove and Coral reefs and National Lake Conservation Plan under one major scheme of "Conservation of Aquatic Resources and Ecosystems"**. This will also help to resolve all Ramsar related issues where all these programmes come under terminology of wetlands irrespective of their being fresh or saline in nature. This will not only help to reduce number of schemes but will also ensure full utilization of the budgetary provisions for the various sub-schemes and make provisions for re-appropriation if needed among different components.

Thereafter Chairman requested members to deliberate on various agenda items one by one and come out with some pragmatic solutions so that whatever initiatives are necessary for regulations are initiated for implementation without further delay. Chairman also informed the members that additional provision of Rs. 200 crores has been made in the budget of 2011-12 for those lakes and rivers which are of cultural and historic importance. This is in addition to assistance provided for Ganga project. He was of the view that this additional money could be utilized for making pilot project at the field level particularly for those important Ramsar sites like Wullar in Kashmir, Pulicat in A.P. and Vembanad in Kerala. These projects will help in shaping the future of wetlands once done in a befitting manner. If we are not in a position to utilize this additional amount fruitfully they may

cut the budget for the next plan and this is the appropriate time for wetland regulatory authority to come forward and formulate some suitable projects for long term conservation goals which would justify ultimately the role of wetland regulatory mechanism for stopping over use of these water bodies beyond their carrying capacity.

Thereafter Chairman asked members to deliberate on various issues.

**Members thanked the chairman for merging these schemes to ensure better results. They were of the view that integrated scheme on aquatic ecosystems will bring more connectivity and enhance efforts for better management.** Members also felt that wetland survey is very important all over the country and as such they need to be inventorised from different perspectives for better use of human kind. Under the recent notification also state governments are required to provide broad geographic delineation of the wetland along with other associated factors so that wetlands which are not notified under the present notification are notified for regulatory purposes immediately for ensuring better health of wetlands. Members also felt that the present financing pattern of the three segments, Mangroves, Wetlands and Lakes can continue as it is for some more time.

After elaborate deliberations following decisions were taken under various agenda items:

**Agenda Item No. 1: Notification process of new wetlands under wetland conservation rules 2010:**

- SAC Ahmadabad to provide hard copies of the report on survey of wetlands in the scale of 1:50000 state wise as well as their CDs for benefit of user agencies to the wetland division.
- SAC to be asked to provide this information immediately on their website so that this can be used by state governments for notifying their wetlands.
- Letter to go to state government to send this information immediately within three months once CDs are made available by SAC Ahmadabad on their website.
- Dr. Parihar from SAC Ahmadabad to be asked to come as a special invitee to give presentation on inventorization of wetlands and also to provide hard copies/CD's of the same to wetland division for their ready reference and use.

**Agenda Item No. 2: Process of Regulation for notified wetlands do's and don'ts.**

In order to expedite process of making pragmatic guidelines for wetland regulation following decisions were taken:

- Three member committee consisting of Prof. C.K. Varshney, Dr. E.J. James and Dr. Asad Rahmani to frame guidelines and circulate it among themselves and finalise the guidelines. Thereafter these will be sent to all members through e-mail to get their inputs to make the regulatory process more stringent, meaningful and result oriented. Process to be completed within two months.

- Guidelines to be presented in the next meeting of the Committee before finalization. Once approved, guidelines to be sent to all concerned state governments for compliance.

**Agenda Item No. 3: Review of Status of all existing authorities in various states:**

- Role of existing authorities in all states will remain as it is but all the decisions made by authorities to be sent to central wetland authority for their review. Indiscrepancies in these rules as per Rule 4 Sub-Rule 1 item (vii) and Rule 4 Sub-rule 5 and Rule 6 Sub-rule 9 will be reviewed by central wetland regulatory authority.

**Agenda item No 4: Relevance of State Level Steering Committee and National Wetland Committee once Central wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA) has been constituted.**

- Taking into consideration constitution of central wetland regulatory authority it was unanimous decision of the all the members not to have National Wetland Committee as its role will be taken over by the central wetland authority henceforth.
- In regard to expert group, members were of the view that this group needs to be expanded and consolidated and constituted in a manner to examine management action plans from various state governments in a more realistic manner to ensure appropriate financial help related to wetland conservation.
- **Taking into consideration number of pilot projects which will come up for wetland regulation from time to time and also new research projects for both long and short term measures, it was proposed that all research proposals related to Wetlands, Mangroves, Coral reefs and National Lake Conservation Plan to be taken out of the research thematic area and a separate committee to be constituted to look into various research proposals related exclusively to wetlands.**
- **This committee to be constituted immediately and meetings of the committee to be held every month for taking up various research projects which will be helpful in holistic conservation of wetlands for regulatory purposes. Constitution of the committee to be put up immediately to Chairman for his approval.**
- State level steering committees to continue in their present form. However these committees need to meet more frequently with atleast two meetings of the committee in a year with active inputs from all the members to ensure result oriented management action plans for long term measures.

**Agenda Item No. 5: Task of Expert Group on Wetlands (EGOW)**

- As indicated earlier, this committee to be reconstituted with more broad base to scrutinize and examine management action plan for financial assistance under various major and minor heads.

**Agenda Item No. 6 : Identification of Nodal Institutes / officers for regulatory mechanism at state level.**

- There will be no change in nodal institutes dealing with wetland concerns at state level. The earlier mechanism in existence at state level will also take up regulatory functions.

**Agenda Item No. 7: Regional/ State consultations for dealing with various regulatory issues.**

- All the members were of the opinion that frequent visits need to be made to some of the important wetlands to discuss issues related to wetland regulation . They were also of the view that all the state governments need to revisit land use classification of wetlands as they have been classified as wastelands in all the revenue records. On the basis of survey of wetlands by SAC Ahmadabad, revenue records to be corrected by each state government so that wetland areas are not shown as waste lands.
- In case of some serious issues like dumping of sewage/solid wastes in wetlands of West Bengal, or reducing of contour levels in wetland of Andhra, meetings to be taken up under the chairmanship of Secretary (E&F) to discuss implications of these issues threadbare with the management /stakeholders/NGOs of the state level for better understanding on these issues and implementation of regulatory process in a more meaningful manner acceptable to all.
- Members were also of the opinion to incorporate wetland issues in the class curricula both in form of formal and non-formal education so that wetland conservations aspects are taught to school children at various levels.
- Media and publicity were suggested as other means for awareness generation in regard to wetland conservation. More emphasis was laid on capacity building programmes at state/regional/local/state/additional/regional/international level to make people conscious about values and functions of wetlands from time to time. These need to be organized in different parts of the country every year atleast one in each quarter.

**Agenda Item No. 8: Co-option of two members from each state on rotational basis in CWRA.**

- Instead of opting two members from each state on rotational basis it was suggested by the chairman to have four members from southern, northern eastern and western region of the country on rotational basis so that all issues related to different wetland are reflected during the decision making in central wetland authority.

**Agenda Item No. 9: Need for setting up of Wetland Regulatory Authority/ Cell along with staff.**

- Chairman approved in principle need for setting up of Wetland Cell. Note to go to administration to ensure provision of staff on contractual basis to wetland division to ensure speedy work related to wetland regulation. **All members welcomed the move and thanked the chairman for taking up this important issue as wetland conservation programme has expanded manifolds and with the onset of wetland regulatory notification it will involve lot of work for which enough experts are needed along with Secretarial staff. Members were of the view to have the staff on contractual basis consisting of various**

**experts/secretarial assistance to be provided to wetland division immediately for smooth functioning.**

**Agenda Item No. 10: Discussion pertaining to penalties for violating regulatory norms.**

- This is already covered under agenda item 2.

**Agenda Item No. 11: Some Administrative changes in the constitution of Regulatory authorities.**

- Chairman approved Special Secretary/ Additional Secretary in charge of Wetland Conservation Programme involving all the three schemes viz. Wetland Conservation Programme, Mangroves, Coral reefs and National Lake Conservation Programme under the broad banner of "Conservation of Natural Resources and Aquatic Ecosystems" to be the Co-chair of the wetland regulatory authority.
- Since there was no member secretary at present in the Central Wetland Regulatory Authority, Chairman approved members suggestion that one Director to be provided to be a member secretary of the central wetland regulatory authority immediately. Other staff also to be provided at different levels to take up wetland conservation programme in a more serious manner as it will involve lot of work which is time bound.

**Agenda Item No. 12: Any other item with the permission of the chair**

- Meetings of the CWRA to be convened more frequently atleast once in a quarter so that issues related to wetland regulations are taken up more seriously and further loss of wetlands is prevented. This will be ensured once all wetlands are notified under the provisions of the wetland regulatory rules after submission of a comprehensive document by the concerned state governments.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

### List of Participants

1. Dr. T. Chatterjee, Secretary(E&F)
2. Sh. E.K. Majhi, Joint Secretary, M/o Agriculture
3. Sh. Mukat Singh, DDG, M/o Social Justice
4. Dr. Asad R. Rahmani, Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai –  
Expert Ornithology
5. Dr. C.K. Varshney, Expert Ecology, JNU, New Delhi.
6. Dr. E.J. James, Director, Water Institute, Karunya University, Coimbatore,  
Expert Hydrology
7. Sh. S.K. Mohiddin, Scientist, Ministry of Water Resources.
8. Dr. D.D. Bask, Scientist, CPCB.
9. Dr. S. Kaul, Advisor – MoEF
10. Sh. Chandan Singh, Scientific Officer, MoEF.