

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

Paryavaran Bhavan,
CGO Complex, Lodi Road,
New Delhi – 110 003
Dated: 17th August 2012

OFFICE ORDER

Sub: Constitution of High Level Working Group to study the preservation of the ecology, environmental integrity and holistic development of the Western Ghats in view of their rich and unique biodiversity

Preamble

Western Ghats are an important geological landform of peninsular India. It is the origin of Godavari, Krishna, Kaveri and a myriad of rivers which are life line for the people of southern India. On its ecological health depends livelihoods of millions of people belonging to the six Western Ghats states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Western Ghats is one of the identified hotspots of biological diversity globally and is a treasure trove of biological diversity. Western Ghats harbour many endemic species of flowering plants, endemic fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals and invertebrates.

It is also notable center of evolution of economically important domesticated plant species such as pepper, cardamom, cinnaom, mango and jackfruit. The forests harboured by the Western Ghats play a significant and important ecological function in sequestration of atmospheric CO₂ and hence have an important role in climate change.

Western Ghats have many unique habitats which are home to a variety of endemic species of flora and fauna. The lower elevations of the southern Western Ghats harbour remarkable relic habitat termed as Myristica swamps. Myristica swamps are the only remaining habitat for Myristicaceae which is one of the most primitive plant family among the flowering plants. Apart from southern Western ghats, these swamps are reported from New Guinea, Venezuela and Amazon basin only. Similarly, the flat-topped lateritic plateaus of northern Western ghats harbour unique and rich endemic herbaceous flora which comes to bloom in the post-monsoon season. Southern Western Ghats feature a unique tropical vegetation type, viz. stunted montane evergreen forests interspersed with grasslands – the shola vegetation. Approximately 80 % of all endemic frog species are restricted to evergreen forests of Western Ghats. The wetland and aquatic habitats of Western Ghats are also unique in terms the rich diversity of species they support.

It is because of this rich biodiversity which is endemic to the region and the fact that Western Ghats are a Centre of origin of many species and hence a cradle for biological

evolution, the UNESCO included parts of Western Ghats in the UNESCO World Natural Heritage List.

The Western Ghats are not only home to the rich biodiversity, but also include areas of high human population density. In the past, major transformations of the landscape have affected the habitat integrity of the Western Ghats.

In recent decades the Government has taken serious measures to conserve the fast declining biological diversity with the establishment of Protected Area network, tiger reserves and biosphere reserves. More recently a significant new initiative has been added to the conservation efforts in the form Ecologically Sensitive Areas. These areas are not just about regulation of development but are also intimately linked to positive promotion of environment-friendly and socially inclusive development.

Keeping this in view the Ministry of Environment & Forests had constituted the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) under the Chairmanship of Prof Madhav Gadgil on 4th March 2010 to, *inter alia*, (i) demarcate ecologically sensitive areas in Western Ghats, (ii) recommend measures for management of these ecologically sensitive areas, (iii) recommend measures for preservation, conservation and rejuvenation of this environmentally sensitive and ecologically significant region and (iv) recommend modalities for the establishment Western Ghats Ecology Authority under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. The tenure of the Panel expired on 31st August 2011 and the Panel has since submitted its report to the Ministry.

The Western Ghats have complex interstate character and the recommendations of WGEEP involve demarcation of Ecologically sensitive zones and zonal regulation of important sectors of activity such as agriculture, land use, mining, industry, tourism, water resources, power, roads and railways. Therefore, the Ministry sought comments/views of the concerned six State Governments and eleven Central Ministries on the report. Further, the Ministry also made the report available in public domain for seeking comments/views from all concerned stakeholders on the report on 23rd May 2012 within a period of 45 days. The Ministry has since received comments/views from some of the concerned State Governments and Central Ministries and also from a large number of stakeholders.

In order to examine the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel Report in a holistic and multidisciplinary fashion keeping in view the comments received from the concerned State Governments/Central Ministries/Stakeholders and other related important aspects such as preservation of precious biodiversity, needs and aspirations of the local and indigenous people, sustainable development and environmental integrity of the region, climate change and constitutional implications of centre-state relations, the Ministry constitutes a High Level Working Group with the following composition and Terms of Reference:

S.No.	Name of Expert	Status
1	Dr. K. Kasturirangan Member (Science), Planning Commission, New Delhi	Chairman
2	Professor C.R. Babu Professor Emeritus, University of Delhi & Ex Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Delhi, Delhi	Member
3	Shri J.M. Mauskar Ex-Special Secretary Ministry of Environment and Forests Government of India, New Delhi	Member
4	Professor Kanchan Chopra Ex-Director, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi	Member
5	Dr. Jagdish Kishwan In his personal capacity and posted at present as Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife) Ministry of Environment and Forests Government of India, New Delhi	Member
6	Shri Darshan Shankar Chairman, Institute of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine, Bengaluru	Member
7	Ms. Sunita Narain Director General Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi	Member
8	Dr. P.S. Roy Director Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, Dehradun	Member
9	Shri Ajay Tyagi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests Government of India, New Delhi	Member Convenor

Special Invitee

Dr. Indrani Chandrasekhran, Advisor (E&F)
Planning Commission, New Delhi

1. Terms of Reference

- I. To examine the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel Report in a holistic and multidisciplinary fashion in the light of the comments received from the concerned State Governments/Central Ministries/Stakeholders considering the following important aspects:
 - a) the imperatives of equitable economic and social growth of the region in the most sustainable manner with special attention and importance to the preservation of the precious biodiversity, wildlife, flora and fauna of the Western Ghats and to prevent further degradation of the same;
 - b) the rights, needs and development aspirations of local and indigenous people, tribals, forest dwellers and the most disadvantaged sections of the local community recognizing

the importance of equitable economic and social growth being harmoniously balanced with sustainable development and environmental integrity;

- c) the effects and challenges of climate change in the ecologically significant Western Ghats region;
 - d) the implications of the UNESCO heritage site recognition of some parts of the Western Ghats; and
 - e) the constitutional implications of Centre-State relations with respect to conservation and sustainable development of the Western Ghats region.
- II. To engage in comprehensive discussions with the representatives of the six states of the Western Ghats region as well as other stakeholders especially environmentalists and conservation specialists.
 - III. To recommend further course of action to the Government with respect to Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel Report
 - IV. Any other relevant matter that may be referred to it by the Central Government in the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
2. The Committee will submit an Action Plan to implement the WGEEP report in the most effective and holistic manner within a period of two months from the date of issue of this order.
 3. The Committee may meet as often as necessary in Delhi or elsewhere in the country as required.
 4. The Committee may co-opt Members and/or special invitees as and when required.
 5. The non-official expert members would be paid TA/DA as per their entitlements under Government of India rules. The admissibility of sitting fee to non-official expert members would be as per OM of Integrated Finance Division (1-15/2011-IFD, dated 14.6.2012). The quantum of sitting fee to non-official expert members would be Rs. 1000/day/member till specific instruction is received from Ministry of Finance. The non-official co-opted members would also be paid sitting fee and TA /DA as per rules.
 6. This issues with the approval of competent authority and with the concurrence of IFD vide their Dy. No. Dir (IFD)/2238 dated 17.8.2012.


(G.V. Subrahmanyam)
Scientist "G"

Copy to:-

1. The Chairman & All Members (by name)
2. PS to MoS (I/C) E & F
3. PPS to Secretary (E&F)
4. PPS to AS (NC)
5. PPS to AS & FA