



## Rationalisation of Autonomous Institutions

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### Why in News

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The **Ministry of Finance** has recommended that the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** “disengage” from five autonomous institutions working under it and merge two others, thus reducing the **16 autonomous organisations** under the ministry to **9**.

### Key Points

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- **Background:**

The recommendations are a part of the report that has been **prepared in accordance with the guidelines prescribed under rule 229 of General Finance rules 2017**.

- Rule 229 pertains to ‘General Principles for setting up of Autonomous Organisations’.
- The purpose of the report is to make specific and actionable recommendations for rationalisation of **autonomous bodies** with a view to furthering the aim of ‘**minimum government, maximum governance,**’ ensuring **efficient use of public funds**.

- **Recommendations for MoEFCC:**

- **Disengagement** from the **Wildlife Institute of India** (WII-Dehradun), **Indian Institute of Forest Management** (IIFM-Bhopal), **Indian Plywood Industries Research & Training Institute** (Bengaluru), **CPR Environmental Education Centre** (Chennai) and **Centre for Environment Education** (Ahmedabad).
  - 'Disengagement' will involve **two aspects - phasing out government support** to the institution in a time-bound manner, **disassociating from the management** of the institutions and allowing the relevant industry/stakeholders to run them.
  - **Disengagement** by the government **with a three-year timeline** and a **gradual budget reduction of 25% each year** is recommended.
  - Both **WII** and **IIFM** can be **converted to deemed universities**.
- The **Society of Integrated Coastal Management** (New Delhi) should be merged with the **National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management** (Tamil Nadu), as both perform similar roles of promoting coastal management. This will **avoid duplication** of activities and **attain economies of scale**.
- **Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History** (Tamil Nadu), which receives Rs. 14 crore annually from MoEFCC, should be merged with the ministry.
- **Statutory bodies** such as **Central Pollution Control Board**, **Central Zoo Authority (CZA)**, **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**, **National Biodiversity Authority** should continue to function under and with the financial support of MoEFCC.

These bodies should be encouraged to become 'self-financed'.

- **Appreciation:**

- This is the **first time ever that such an audit has been done** of institutions which took around four years to get completed.
- Making WII and other institutions into deemed universities will **give more freedom to the institutions** to initiate more courses and have enhanced faculties.

- **Criticism:**

- The disengagement will make these institutions **worry for financial issues rather than research**, which should be their prime focus.

The environment is a public issue and there must be good public institutions to safeguard it.

- The government's disengagement from these institutions is seen as **'the first step towards sending them into private hands'**.

If the government feels that funds are not being utilised properly or the institutions are not performing well, their officials should be held accountable rather than taking the route of disengagement as this will have an impact on those students who dream of studying these specialised subjects but cannot afford the high fees charged by private universities.

- **Other Related Steps:**

- Recently, the **Ministry of Textiles** has **abolished the All India Handloom Board and the All India Handicrafts Board.**
- In **2018**, the Union Cabinet had approved the proposal for **closure of Autonomous Bodies**, namely, **Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN)** and **Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh (JSK)** and the functions were proposed to be vested in Department of Health & Family Welfare (DoHFW).

## **Autonomous Bodies**

- These are **set up** whenever it is felt that certain functions need to be discharged outside the governmental set up with some amount of independence and flexibility without day-to-day interference of the Governmental machinery.
- These are set up **by the Ministries/Departments concerned with the subject matter** and are funded through grants-in-aid, either fully or partially, depending on the extent which such institutes generate internal resources of their own.
  - These **grants are regulated by the Ministry of Finance** through their instructions as well as the instructions relating to powers for creation of posts and etc.
  - The amount disbursed to autonomous/grantee bodies was Rs. 799.55 billion, which, **in 2019-20, was increased** to Rs. 943.84 billion.
- They are mostly registered as societies under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and in certain cases they have been set up as statutory institutions under the provisions contained in various Acts.
- These are a **major stakeholder in the government's functioning** as they are engaged in diverse activities, ranging from formulating frameworks for policies, conducting research, and preserving the cultural heritage, etc.
  - Institutes imparting technical, medical and higher education fall in this category.

## **Way Forward**

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There is a need to review the governance of ABs, and devise uniform procedures. Many of ABs act as interfaces between the government and the public. Thus, each ministry should undertake a comprehensive review of ABs under their jurisdiction. ABs that have outlived the cause for which they were established may need to be closed or merged with a similar organisation or their memorandum altered as per the new charter.

**Source: IE**