



Conserving India's Coastal Ecosystems

For Prelims: CAG, Environment Protection Act, Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, Gulf of Mannar, Gulf of Kutch

For Mains: Conserving India's Coastal Ecosystems and related issues

Why in News?

Recently, the [Comptroller and Auditor General \(CAG\)](#) of India tabled a report in Parliament on whether steps taken by the Union Environment Ministry to **conserve India's coastal ecosystems have been successful**.

- This latest report **contains the observations from an audit of Conservation of Coastal Ecosystems from 2015-20**.

Why did the CAG conduct this Audit?

- The CAG has a **constitutional mandate to investigate and report** on publicly funded programmes.
- The CAG **conducted "pre-audit studies"** and found that there were large-scale Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) violations in the coastal stretches.
 - **Coastal land up to 500 metres from the High Tide Line (HTL)** and a stage of 100m along banks of creeks, lagoons, estuaries, backwater and rivers subject to tidal fluctuations is called Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ).
- The media reported **incidents of illegal construction activities** (reducing beach space) and effluent discharged by local bodies, industries, and aquaculture farms that prompted a detailed investigation.

How is the Center Responsible for Conserving the Coastline?

- **About:**
 - The government has issued notifications under the [Environment Protection Act, 1986](#), to regulate activities along India's coasts particularly regarding construction.
 - The [Coastal Regulation Zone Notification \(CRZ\) 2019](#), implemented by the Ministry, classifies the coastal area into different zones to manage infrastructure activities and regulate them.
 - The **three institutions responsible for the implementation of the CRZ** are:
 - **National Coastal Zone Management Authority (NCZMA)** at the Centre
 - **State/Union Territory Coastal Zone Management Authorities (SCZMAs/UTCZMAs)** in every coastal State and Union Territory and
 - **District Level Committees (DLCs)** in every district that has a coastal

stretch and where the CRZ notification is applicable.

- **Role of the Bodies:**
 - These bodies examine if **CRZ clearances granted by the government are as per procedure**, if project developers once given the go-ahead are complying with conditions, and if the project development objectives under the [Integrated Coastal Zone Management Programme \(ICZMP\)](#) are successful.
 - They also **evaluate the measures taken up by the government** towards achieving the targets under [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

What did the Audit Find?

- **NCZMA as a Permanent Body:**
 - The **Environment Ministry hadn't notified NCZMA as a permanent body** and it was being reconstituted every few years.
 - In the absence of **defined membership**, it was functioning as an ad-hoc body.
- **Role of Expert Appraisal Committees:**
 - There were **instances of the Expert Appraisal Committees** not being present during project deliberations.
 - EAC is a **committee of scientific experts and senior bureaucrats** who evaluate the feasibility of an infrastructure project and its environmental consequences.
 - There **were also instances of the members of the EAC** being fewer than half of the total strength during the deliberations.
- **SCZMAs not Constituted:**
 - At state-level where the State Coastal Zone Management Authorities (SCZMAs) take decisions, the **central auditor observed the instances where SCZMA granted clearance on its own without recommending the projects** to relevant authorities.
 - Further, **SCZMAs had recommended many projects** without the submission of mandatory documents.
- **Approval of Projects despite Inadequacies:**
 - There were **instances of projects being approved despite inadequacies** in the [Environment Impact Assessment \(EIA\)](#) reports.
 - These included **non-accredited consultants preparing the EIA**, using outdated data, not evaluating environmental impacts of the project, not appraising the disasters which the project area was prone to and so forth.

What Problems did the CAG find in the States?

- Tamil Nadu didn't have a **strategy in place to conserve the [Gulf of Mannar Islands](#)**.
- In Goa, there was no system for monitoring coral reefs and no management plans to conserve [turtle](#) nesting sites.
- In Gujarat, instruments procured to study the physiochemical parameters of soil and water of the inertial area of the [Gulf of Kutch](#) weren't used.
- Sea patrolling in [Gahirmatha Sanctuary](#), in Kendrapara, Odisha did not happen.

What are the Indian Initiatives for Coastal Management?

- [National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management:](#)
 - It aims to **promote integrated and sustainable management of the coastal and marine areas** in India for the benefit and wellbeing of the traditional coastal and island communities.
- [Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan:](#)
 - It is a **process for the management of the coast** using an integrated approach, regarding all aspects of the coastal zone, including geographical and political boundaries, in an attempt to achieve sustainability.
- [Coastal Regulation Zone:](#)
 - The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification was issued in 1991 under the Environmental Protection Act, 1986, by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate

Change to regulate activities in coastal areas of India.

Way Forward

- These reports are placed before the Standing Committees of Parliament, which select those findings and recommendations that they judge to be the most critical to public interest and arrange hearings on them.
- In this case, the Environment Ministry is expected to explain omissions pointed out by the CAG and make amends.
- SCZMAs and NCZMAs may be made as permanent bodies with full time members to carry out all the mandated activities for protecting the coastal environment.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. Consider the following statements: (2019)

The Environment Protection Act, 1986 empowers the Government of India to

1. state the requirement of public participation in the process of environmental protection, and the procedure and manner in which it is sought
2. lay down the standards for emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (b)

Exp:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2006 was issued under relevant provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
 - The EIA provides for screening, scoping, public consultation and appraisal of project proposals.
 - One of the most significant determinants of EIA is the procedure of Public Hearing and Public Participation on any developmental project.
- However, the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986, nowhere mentions public participation for environmental protection. It is only concerned with government authorities and polluters to protect the environment. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
 - The EPA, 1986 empowers the Central Government to take all appropriate measures to prevent and control pollution and to establish effective machinery for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of environment and preventing, abating and controlling environmental pollution.
 - Section 3 of the EPA, 1986, empowers the Central Government to lay down standards for emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources having regard to the quality or composition of the emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from such sources. Hence, statement 2 is correct.
- **Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.**

Source: TH

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