



# Mekedatu Project: River Cauvery

## Why in News

Recently, the Karnataka government has decided to challenge before the [National Green Tribunal \(NGT\)](#) its decision **to appoint a joint committee**.

- The **joint committee** is supposed to **look into allegations of unauthorised construction activity taking place in [Mekedatu](#)**, where Karnataka had proposed to construct a dam across the Cauvery.
  - **Mekedatu**, meaning goat's leap, is a **deep gorge** situated at the confluence of the rivers [Cauvery and its tributary Arkavathi](#).

## Key Points

- **Mekedatu Project:**
  - The Rs. 9,000 crore project **aims to store and supply water for drinking purposes for the Bengaluru city**. Around **400 megawatts (MW)** of power is also proposed to be **generated** through the project.
  - It was first **approved by the Karnataka state government in 2017**.
  - It received **approval from the erstwhile Ministry of Water Resources** for the detailed

project report and is awaiting approval from the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.

- The approval from MoEFCC is crucial because **63% of the forest area of the [Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary](#) will be submerged.**
- In 2018, Tamil Nadu approached the **[Supreme Court \(SC\)](#)** against the project even if **Karnataka had held that it would not affect the flow of water to Tamil Nadu.**
- In June 2020, during the **[Cauvery Water Management Authority](#)**'s meeting, **Tamil Nadu reiterated its opposition to the project.**
- **Reasons for Opposition by Tamil Nadu:**
  - Tamil Nadu is **opposed to any project being proposed in the upper riparian** unless it was approved by the SC.
  - Karnataka has **no right to construct any reservoir on an inter-state river without the consent of the lower riparian state** i.e. Tamil Nadu in this case.
    - The project is against the final order of the **[Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal \(CWDT\)](#)** in which the SC held that no state can claim exclusive ownership or assert rights to deprive other states of the waters of inter-state rivers.
  - The **CWDT and the SC have found that the existing storage facilities available in the Cauvery basin were adequate** for storing and distributing water so Karnataka's proposal is ex-facie (on the face of it) untenable and should be **rejected outright.**
  - It has also held that the **reservoir is not just for drinking water alone, but to increase the extent of irrigation**, which is in clear violation of the Cauvery Water Disputes Award.

## Cauvery River Dispute

- **River Cauvery (Kaveri):**
  - It is known as '**Ponni**' in Tamil also known as **Ganga of the south**, and it is the **fourth largest river of southern India.**
  - It is a **sacred river of southern India.** It rises on **Brahmagiri Hill** of the **[Western](#)**

**Ghats** in southwestern Karnataka state, flows in a southeasterly direction through the states of **Karnataka and Tamil Nadu**, and descends the **Eastern Ghats** in a series of great falls and **drains into Bay of Bengal** through **Pondicherry**.

- Some of its tributaries are **Arkavathi, Hemavathi, Lakshmana Theertha, Shimsa, Kabini and Harangi**.

▪ **The Dispute:**

◦ **Historical Background:**

- As the river originates in Karnataka, flows through Tamil Nadu with major tributaries coming from Kerala and drains into Bay of Bengal through Pondicherry the **dispute therefore involves 3 states and one Union Territory**.
- The genesis of the dispute is **150 years old and dates back to the two agreements of arbitration in 1892 and 1924** between the then **Madras presidency and Mysore**.
- It **entailed the principle that the upper riparian state must obtain consent of lower riparian state** for any construction activity viz. reservoir on the river Cauvery.

◦ **Recent Developments:**

- From **1974, Karnataka started diverting water** into its four newly made reservoirs, without the consent of Tamil Nadu resulting in a dispute.
- To resolve the matter, the **CWDT was established in 1990** which took 17 years to arrive at the **final order (2007)** on how Cauvery water should be shared between the 4 riparian states in normal rainfall conditions.
- In distress years, a pro-rata basis shall be used, it instructed. The government again took 6 year and **notified the order in 2013**.
- This was challenged in SC which directed Karnataka to release 12000 cusecs of water to Tamil Nadu prompting protests in the State.
- The final verdict of the SC came in 2018 where it declared the **Cauvery a national asset** and largely **upheld the water-sharing arrangements finalised by the CWDT** and also reduced the allocation of water from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu.
  - As per the SC, **Karnataka** would get 284.75 thousand million cubic feet (tmcft), **Tamil Nadu** 404.25 tmcft, **Kerala** 30 tmcft and **Puducherry** 7 tmcft.
  - It also directed the Centre to notify the **Cauvery Management Scheme**. The central government notified the 'Cauvery Water Management Scheme' in June 2018, constituting the **'Cauvery Water Management Authority'** and the **'Cauvery Water Regulation Committee'**.

## Way Forward

- The **states need to shed the regional approach** as the solution lies in cooperation and coordination, not in conflict. The **planning must be done at the basin level** to make the solution sustainable and ecologically viable.
- In the long term, there is a **need to recharge the river through afforestation, river linking**, etc and **increased focus is needed on increasing water use efficiency** viz. micro irrigation, **awareness in people to prudently use water** and water smart strategies.

**Source:TH**