



Kerala's Protest against ESZ Notification

For Prelims: Eco Sensitive Zones, Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986, National Wildlife Action Plan, National Park, Wildlife Sanctuary, Protected Forests

For Mains: Biodiversity and its Conservation, Eco Sensitive Zones, Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986, National Wildlife Action Plan

Why in News?

Farmers in Kerala are protesting against [Supreme Court's](#) order to establish [Eco-Sensitive Zones \(ESZs\)](#).

- The SC has directed to have a **mandatory ESZ of minimum one kilometre measured from the demarcated boundary of every protected forest**, including the [national parks and wildlife sanctuaries](#).
- The Kerala State Assembly demands the Centre to notify the zones by considering the State government's proposals that marked the **ESZ as zero around 10 protected areas of the State**.

What are Eco-Sensitive Zones?

- **About:**
 - The [National Wildlife Action Plan](#) (2002-2016) of the [Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change \(MoEFCC\)](#) stipulated that state governments should declare land falling within 10 km of the boundaries of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries as eco fragile zones or Eco Sensitive Zones (ESZs) under the [Environmental \(Protection\) Act, 1986](#).
 - While the 10-km rule is implemented as a general principle, the extent of its application can vary.
 - Areas **beyond 10-km can also be notified by the Union government as ESZs**, if they hold larger ecologically important **"sensitive corridors."**
- **Significance:**
 - ESZs are created as **"shock absorbers" for the protected areas**, to minimize the negative impact on the "fragile ecosystems" by certain human activities taking place nearby.
 - They are meant to act as **a transition zone from areas requiring higher protection to those requiring lesser protection**.
 - The ESZs are not meant to hamper the daily activities of people living in the vicinity, but are meant to guard the protected areas and **"refine the environment around them"**.

What is the Background?

- The order comes a decade after the **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) report** (Gadgil report) that had **radically influenced the socio-political, economic and ecological narratives in the State.**
 - Though not to the level of the high-pitched public unrest and protests that the State witnessed during the days preceding the WGEEP report, the **ESZ notification too has triggered state-wide protests.**
- Earlier, the State Government had **taken care to exclude the areas with high population density, government and quasi-government institutions, and public institutions from the ambit of its Draft ESZ notification.**
- The marking of the ESZ for the protected areas that shared the forest boundary with the **neighbouring States was a peaceful affair as there were no human habitations** in between.
- However, the **apex court's recent order has changed the picture and forced the State government to re-look the ESZs of at least 10 protected areas** which were earlier marked as zero.

Why Protests Over ESZ notification?

- The notification has stirred an unpleasant situation in Kerala where **any regulatory mechanism on land and land use patterns would have political ramifications.**
- Kerala is concerned about the **possible impact on its unique landscape.**
 - **Nearly 30% of Kerala is forested land and the [Western Ghats](#) occupies 48% of the State.**
- Due to the high density of human population near the notified protected areas, farmer's groups and political parties **have been demanding that all human settlements be exempt from the ESZ ruling.**
- The State Government **apprehends that the SC's notification may worsen the ground situation as it would adversely impact the interests of the State** besides upsetting the lives of millions living near the protected areas.

Way Forward

- The States **should act as a trustee for the benefit of the general public** in relation to natural resources so that sustainable development can be achieved in the long term.
- The government **should not confine its role to that of a facilitator of economic activities** for the immediate upliftment of the fortunes of the State.
- Afforestation and reforestation of degraded forest, regeneration of lost habitats, **promoting carbon footprints can be done.**
- Propagating Conservation techniques and creating awareness about overexploitation of resources and its adverse impacts among masses.

[Source: IE](#)

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