



## Plea on Western Ghats

**For Prelims:** Western Ghats, Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA), Gadgil Committee, Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), Kasturirangan Committee.

**For Mains:** Significance of Western Ghats, Threats Faced by Western Ghats.

### Why in News?

Recently, the Supreme Court has dismissed a **Public Interest Litigation (PIL)**, which challenged the [Gadgil and Kasturirangan Committees](#) on [Western Ghats Ecologically Sensitive Area \(ESA\)](#).

### What are Eco-Sensitive Areas?

- Eco-Sensitive Areas (ESAs) are areas notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) **around Protected Areas**, National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries under the [Environment Protection Act 1986](#).
- The basic aim is **to regulate certain activities around National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries** so as to minimize the negative impacts of such activities on the fragile ecosystem encompassing the protected areas.

### What was the PIL?

- The petitioner had pleaded to the apex court to not implement the recommendations of the Western Ghats Ecologically Expert Panel (**Gadgil Committee Report**) and the **High-Level Working Group (Kasturirangan Committee Report)**.
- It asked the court to **declare the 2018 draft notification** by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) **as ultra vires** (beyond its legal power or authority) as it may lead to the **violation of the [Right To Life](#) of the citizens** hailing from the Western Ghats, especially Kerala.
- The **petition pushed** for the implementation of the 2014 report of the **expert committee set up** by the former Chief Minister of Kerala.
  - The report recommended implementing changes in clauses of the **Environmentally Fragile Land (EFL)** in the Western Ghats, stating the **lapses occurred in determining the EFL areas**.

### What did SC Rule?

- But the apex court dismissed the petition stating that the MoEF&CC draft notification it challenged in 2018, was followed by a **fifth draft notification** that was issued in July 2022.
  - The draft notification issued in July prohibits activities like **mining, thermal power plants, and all 'Red' category industries** from coming up in the ESA.
- The Court did not find **any reason to exercise its jurisdiction under [Article 32](#)** of the Constitution of India.

## What do the Committees say?

- **Gadgil Committee:**
  - Also known as the [Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel \(WGEEP\)](#), it recommended that all of the Western Ghats be declared as the Ecological Sensitive Areas (ESA) with only limited development allowed in graded zones.
  - It classified the whole of the Western Ghats, spread across six states and covering 44 districts and 142 talukas, as an **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)**.
- **Kasturirangan Committee:**
  - It sought to **balance development and environment protection** in contrast to the system proposed by the Gadgil report.
  - The [Kasturirangan committee](#) recommended that instead of the total area of Western Ghats, only **37% of the total area should be brought under ESA** and a complete ban on mining, quarrying and sand mining be imposed in ESA.

## What do we Need to Know about the Western Ghats?

- **About:**
  - Western Ghats consist of **a chain of mountains running parallel to India's Western Coast** and passing from the states of **Kerala, Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka**.
- **Significance:**
  - The Ghats **influence the Indian monsoon weather patterns** that mediate the warm tropical climate of the region.
  - They act as a **barrier to rain-laden monsoon winds** that sweep in from the south-west.
  - Western Ghats are **home to tropical evergreen forests**, as well as to 325 globally threatened species.
- **Threats to Western Ghats:**
  - **Developmental Pressures:**
    - Urbanisation together with agricultural expansion and livestock grazing are posing **serious threats to the region**.
    - About 50 million people are estimated to live in the Western Ghats Region, resulting in developmental pressures that are orders of magnitude greater than many protected areas around the world.
  - **Biodiversity Related Issues:**
    - Forest loss, habitat fragmentation, habitat degradation by invasive **plant species, encroachment and conversion also continue** to affect the Ghats.
    - Fragmentation caused by development pressure in the Western **Ghats is shrinking the availability of wildlife corridors** and suitable habitats outside Protected Areas.
  - **Climate Change:**
    - In the intermediate years, the climate crisis has gained momentum:
    - **In the past four years (2018-21)**, floods have ravaged the ghat areas of Kerala thrice killing hundreds of people and delivering an overwhelming blow to infrastructure and livelihoods
    - **Landslides and flash floods** ravaged the ghat areas of Konkan in 2021
    - Cyclones are also gaining intensity with the warming of the Arabian Sea leaving the west coast especially vulnerable.
  - **Threats from Industrialisation:**
    - More polluting industries, **quarries and mines, roads, and townships are likely to be planned due to the absence** of the Western Ghats ESA policy.
    - This implies more damage to the fragile landscape of the region in future.

## Way Forward

- Considering the changes in climate, which would affect the livelihood of all people and hurt the nation's economy, **it is prudent to conserve the fragile ecosystems**.
- A proper analysis based on scientific study followed by consensus among various stakeholders

addressing respective **concerns is required urgently.**

- A holistic view of threats and demands on the forest land, products and services, devising strategies to address these with clearly stated objectives for the authorities involved must be taken.

### UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**Q. 'Gadgil Committee Report' and 'Kasturirangan Committee Report', sometimes seen in the news, are related to (2016)**

- (a) constitutional reforms
- (b) Ganga Action Plan
- (c) linking of rivers
- (d) protection of Western Ghats

**Ans: (d)**

**Exp:**

- Gadgil Committee Report and Kasturirangan Committee Report are both related to the protection of Western Ghats.
- Gadgil Committee was formed by the Ministry of Environment in 2010 to study the impact of population pressure, climate change and development activities on the Western Ghats.
- Kasturirangan Committee was formed in 2012 for finding a holistic way of protecting the biodiversity of the Western Ghats and addressing the rightful aspirations for inclusive growth and sustainable development of indigenous residents.
- **Therefore, option (d) is the correct answer.**

**Source: DTE**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/plea-on-western-ghats>