



Punjab-Haryana Water Sharing Dispute

For Prelims: [Supreme Court](#), [Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966](#), [Beas-Satluj Link Project](#), [Tehri Dam](#), [Article 262](#), [Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956](#), [Inter-state Council](#), [PMKSY](#).

For Mains: Punjab-Haryana water sharing dispute, Inter-state water dispute and resolution.

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

Punjab opposes the [Bhakra Beas Management Board \(BBMB\)](#)'s decision to release an **additional 4,500 cusecs of water to Haryana**.

- Meanwhile, **Haryana** has threatened to move the [Supreme Court](#) to secure its share, escalating a **decades-old dispute** over sharing the water of Bhakra Nangal Dam.

What are the Key Facts Regarding the Punjab-Haryana Water Sharing Dispute?

- **Current Crisis:** Haryana demanded 8,500 cusecs from the **Bhakra-Nangal project—4,500 cusecs more** than its current allocation. **Punjab refused**, forcing the **BBMB** to intervene.
 - In a **BBMB meeting**, **Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi** voted in favor of releasing extra water.
 - Punjab has **refused to open additional sluice gates**, leading Haryana to approach the **Supreme Court**.
- **Role of BBMB:** Before the division of Punjab in 1966, the **Bhakra-Nangal project** was managed by **Punjab**. In **1966**, the **Bhakra Management Board (BMB)** was formed under the [Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966](#) to oversee the project, ensuring it benefited **Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh**.
 - **BMB** was renamed **BBMB** in **1976**, it now manages **Bhakra Dam** (Himachal), **Nangal Dam** (Punjab), [Beas-Satluj Link Project](#) (Pandoh Dam), and **Pong Dam**.
- **Bhakra Nangal Dam:** It comprises **two separate but complementary dams** on the River Satluj i.e., the **Bhakra dam** in **Himachal Pradesh**, and the **Nangal dam** (10 km downstream in **Punjab**).
 - It is **India's 2nd tallest dam** after the [Tehri Dam](#) and its reservoir is known as the **Gobind Sagar**.
 - It is a **joint venture** of 3 state governments - **Rajasthan, Haryana, and Punjab**.
 - After, creation of Haryana, the **Satluj-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal** was proposed to deliver Haryana's share but **remains incomplete** due to Punjab's resistance.



Why are Punjab and Haryana Facing a Water Crisis?

- **Groundwater Depletion:** Groundwater depletion has become a **serious concern** in **Punjab, Rajasthan, and Haryana**, where the extraction rate has exceeded the recharge rate by **66, 51, and 34%**, respectively.
- **Falling Water Levels:** Dams like **Bhakra, Pong**, and **Ranjit Sagar** are experiencing **significantly lower water levels**, attributed to reduced **snowfall in the Himalayas**, which feeds these rivers.
- **Agricultural Practices:** **Water-intensive crops**, especially **rice**, have worsened **groundwater depletion**.
 - **Subsidies** for electricity and free water in states like **Punjab and Haryana** encourage **unregulated pumping**.
- **Indus Waters Treaty (1960):** The treaty limits India's access to the western rivers (Indus, Chenab, Jhelum), **vital** for irrigation in **Punjab and other states**, causing **regional water stress**.
- **Urban & Industrial Demand Surge:** **Rapid urbanization** in cities like **Chandigarh, Gurugram, and Ludhiana** has increased domestic **water demand**, while **thermal power plants** and industries further strain **limited water resources**.

What is the Interstate River Water Dispute?

- **About:** Interstate river water disputes arise when **two or more states disagree** over the **usage, distribution, or control** of rivers that flow across their boundaries.
- **Causes:**
 - **Riparian Rights:** Conflicts between **upstream and downstream states** over equitable water distribution.
 - **Water Sharing Agreements:** **Ambiguities** in agreements often fuel disputes when **one state feels aggrieved** by unequal shares or unfair allocations.
 - **Water Scarcity & Climate Change:** Increased competition due to **droughts** and changing weather patterns.
 - Political and electoral considerations **complicate** dispute resolution.
 - **Agriculture vs Industry:** Tensions between **agricultural and industrial water** needs.
 - **Economic Disparities:** Wealthier states with better infrastructure dominate water access.
 - **Legal Delays:** Prolonged tribunals or **Supreme Court** judgments delay resolution.
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Entry 56 of the Union List:** It grants the Union Government authority to **regulate and**

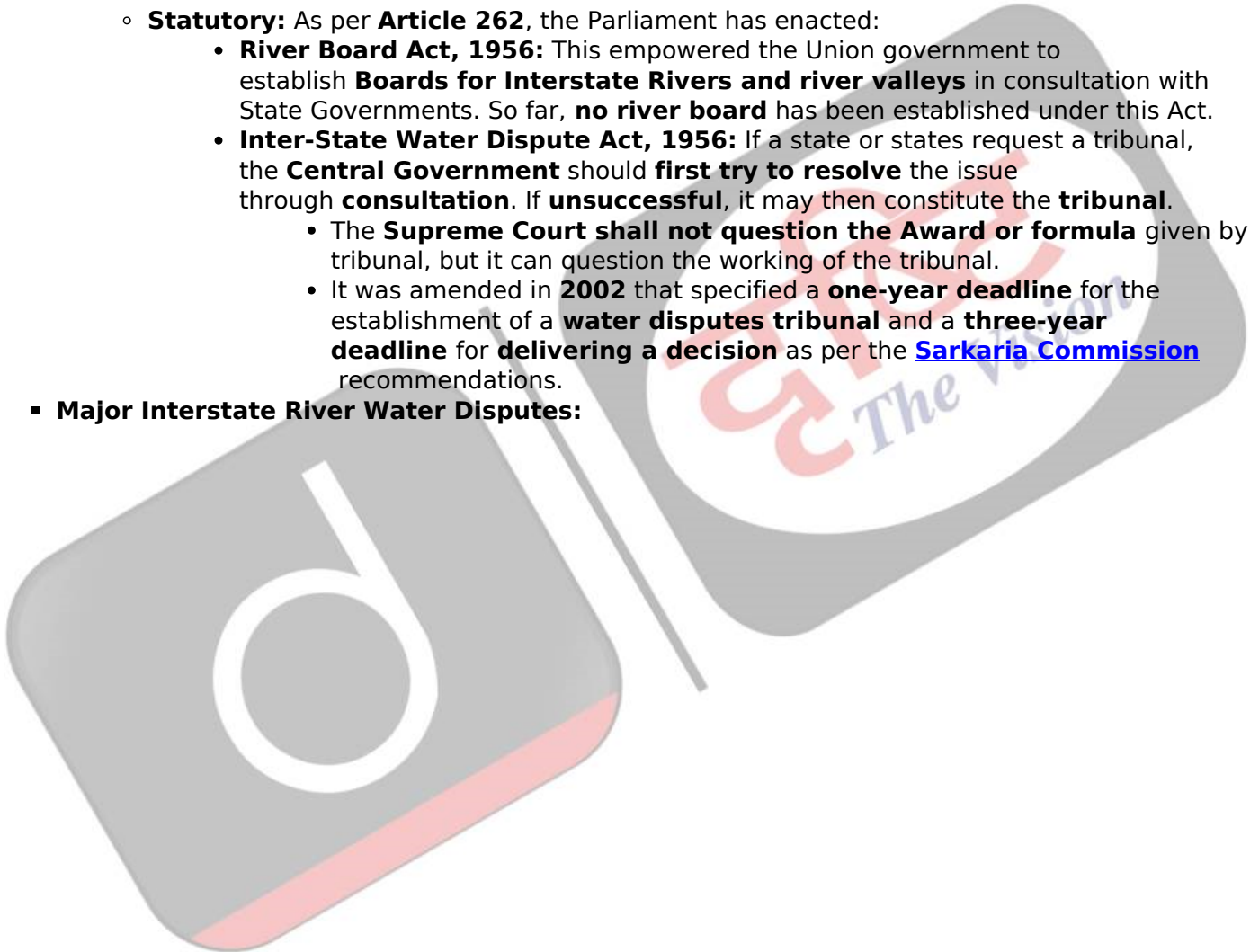
develop inter-state rivers and river valleys, as deemed necessary by Parliament for public interest.

- **Entry 32 of the Concurrent List:** It is related to **shipping** and **navigation** on **inland waterways** as regards **mechanically propelled vessels**, and the rule of the road on such waterways.
- **Entry 17 of the State List:** It pertains to **water**, covering aspects such as **water supply, irrigation, canals, drainage, embankments, water storage**, and hydro power.

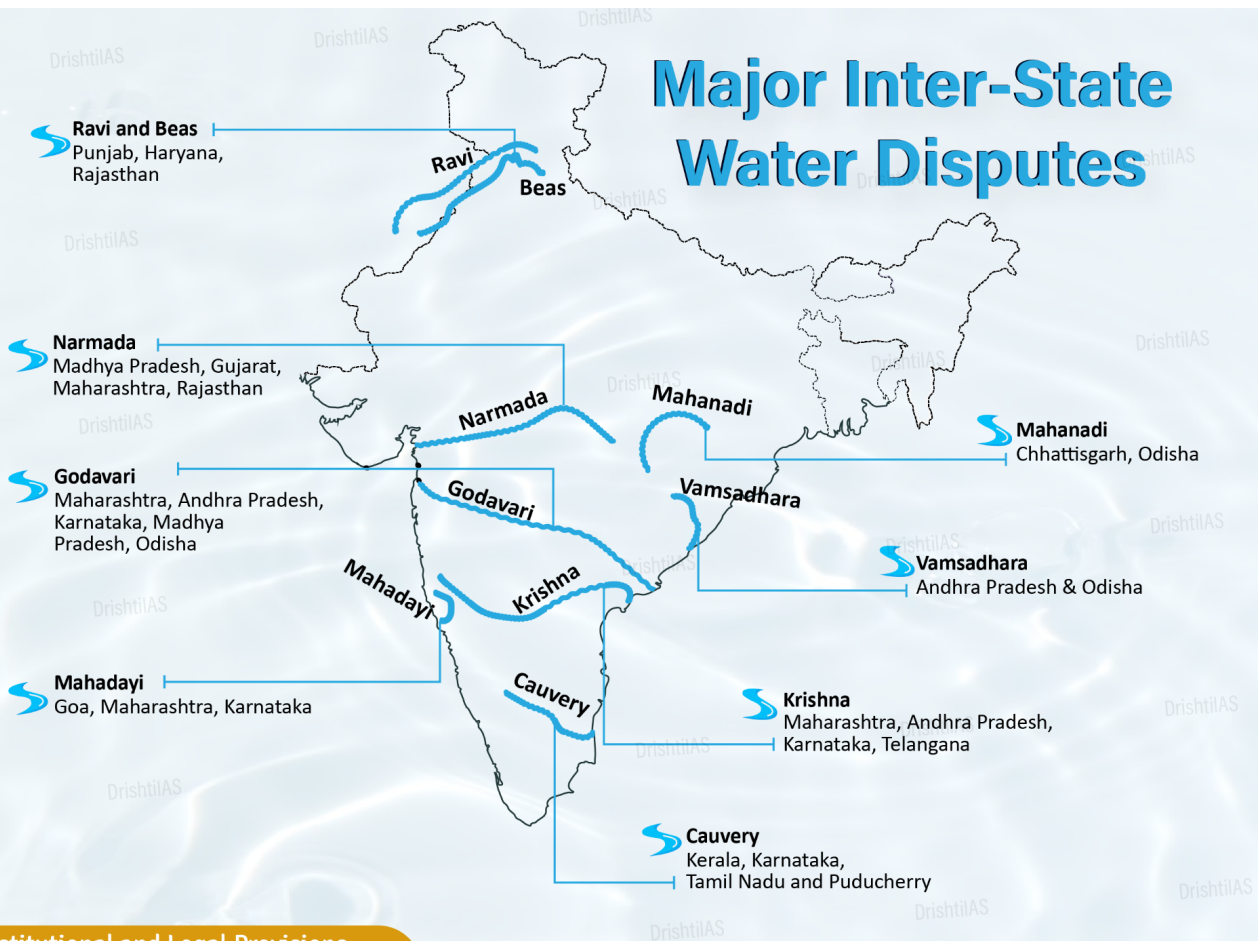
▪ **Disputes Resolution Provisions:**

- **Constitution:** According to [Article 262](#), in case of **disputes relating to waters:**
 - Parliament has the authority to **enact laws** for the adjudication of any **dispute or complaint** regarding the **use, distribution, or control of waters** in any inter-State river or river valley.
 - Parliament may, through legislation, specify that **neither the Supreme Court nor any other court** shall have jurisdiction over such disputes or complaints as mentioned above.
- **Statutory:** As per **Article 262**, the Parliament has enacted:
 - **River Board Act, 1956:** This empowered the Union government to establish **Boards for Interstate Rivers and river valleys** in consultation with State Governments. So far, **no river board** has been established under this Act.
 - **Inter-State Water Dispute Act, 1956:** If a state or states request a tribunal, the **Central Government** should **first try to resolve** the issue through **consultation**. If **unsuccessful**, it may then constitute the **tribunal**.
 - The **Supreme Court shall not question the Award or formula** given by tribunal, but it can question the working of the tribunal.
 - It was amended in **2002** that specified a **one-year deadline** for the establishment of a **water disputes tribunal** and a **three-year deadline** for **delivering a decision** as per the [Sarkaria Commission](#) recommendations.

▪ **Major Interstate River Water Disputes:**



Major Inter-State Water Disputes



Constitutional and Legal Provisions:

- **Article 262:** Provides for adjudication of interstate water disputes. Under this, parliament enacted two laws: The River Boards Act, 1956 & the ISWD Act, 1956
- **The River Boards Act, 1956:** Establishment of river boards for the regulation of inter-state rivers
- **The ISWD Act, 1956:** Central government establish a temporary tribunal to resolve water disputes between two or more states
[Amended in 2002; Mandated a 1 year time frame to set up the water disputes tribunal and a 3 year time frame to give a decision (**Sarkaria Commission**)]
- **State List (Entry 17):** Deals with water
- **Union List (Entry 56):** Parliament has the authority to regulate and develop inter-State rivers and river valleys if it's deemed necessary for the public interest



How to Solve Interstate River Water Dispute?

- **Strengthening Institutional Frameworks:** Amend the [Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956](#) to include **penalties for non-compliance** (such as reduction of central funding), and the establishment of a **single permanent tribunal** (as proposed in the 2019 amendment) with **specialized benches**.
- **Cooperative Federalism & Mediation:** Introduce **mediation and negotiation** before litigation, involving **neutral mediators** such as **retired judges and hydrologists**, alongside **political dialogue** through platforms like **PM-led inter-state council**.
- **Scientific Water Management:** Provide **subsidies for drip and sprinkler irrigation** (similar to [PMKSY](#)) and promote **crop diversification** to reduce water-intensive crops like **sugarcane** in drought-prone areas.
- **Rainwater Harvesting:** Implement a **national policy for aquifer recharge** and **penalize over-extraction** of groundwater (e.g., Punjab's depleting resources) to ensure sustainable water usage.
 - The **INDIA-Groundwater Resource Estimation System (IN-GRES)**, which tracks and maps groundwater extraction, should be implemented nationwide for effective **groundwater management** based on its **criticality**.
- **Balanced Infrastructure Development:** Ensure **equitable water infrastructure** development

that balances the **interests of all states**, while promoting **decentralized conservation** to reduce reliance on large-scale structures amid **climate change** and **variable river flows**.

Conclusion

The **Punjab-Haryana water dispute** highlights the complexities of **interstate river water sharing**, exacerbated by **legal, political, and environmental challenges**. Effective resolution requires strengthening **institutional frameworks**, fostering **cooperative federalism**, implementing **scientific water management**, and ensuring **equitable infrastructure development** to address the needs of all states and promote **sustainable water use**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q.Examine the causes and challenges of interstate river water disputes in India. How can the existing legal and institutional frameworks be strengthened to ensure timely resolution?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q. Constitutional mechanisms to resolve the inter-state water disputes have failed to address and solve the problems. Is the failure due to structural or process inadequacy or both? Discuss. (2013)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/punjab-haryana-water-sharing-dispute>