

Report Summary

Review of Ground Water Scenario and need for a Comprehensive Policy

- The Standing Committee on Water Resources submitted its report on the subject “Review of ground water scenario, need for a comprehensive policy and measures to address problems in the country with particular reference to (i) dark blocks; and (ii) contamination of underground water by certain industries” on December 22, 2015. Key recommendations of the committee include:
 - **Database on natural and artificial recharge of water:** Assessment of ground water resources in the country was last done in 2011. Assessment of ground water resources should be undertaken on a regular basis, preferably after every two years. Also, a single agency should be formed to maintain a database on (i) the amount of ground water being utilised by various stakeholders, and (ii) natural and artificial recharge to ground water.
 - **Study of Dark Blocks:** A study to assess land-use and proportion of agricultural land falling under dark blocks (over-exploited assessment units) should be initiated. This will help determine suitable cropping pattern in areas that are water stressed. Additionally, an impact study to determine losses caused to agriculture, economy, health and environment due to dark blocks should be carried out.
 - **Ground water withdrawal for agriculture:** In the states of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, ground water levels are fast depleting due to excessive exploitation for agriculture use. To improve the situation, measures suggested include, (i) on-farm water management techniques and adoption of improved irrigation methods, (ii) implementation of ‘Master Plan for Artificial Recharge to Ground Water’, and (iii) revamping agricultural power pricing structure, as flat rate of electricity adversely affects the use of ground water. A well-defined policy on ground water extraction should also be framed to ensure long-term sustainability.
 - **Water under concurrent list of the Constitution:** Bringing the subject of water under the concurrent list will help evolve a comprehensive plan of action. Consensus between the centre and states will result in better conservation, development and management of water, including ground water.
- **Master Plan for Artificial Recharge to Ground Water:** The document ‘Master Plan for Artificial Recharge to Ground Water’ was prepared by the Central Ground Water Board in 2013 and circulated to all states. No review regarding the implementation of the Plan has been done so far. A comprehensive review of the follow-up action taken by states/ union territories should be undertaken. A time-bound roadmap to achieve the objectives of the plan should be put in place.
- **Synergy between MGNREGS and ground water management:** Steps should be initiated to achieve optimised returns on works related to ground water conservation taken under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. Coordination between the Ministries of Water Resources, Agriculture, and Rural Development through a special body will be helpful in this regard.
- **Census of water bodies and installation of water meets on tube wells:** An inventory of water bodies (including ponds) in the country should be undertaken and completed in a definite time-frame. Special programs for the upkeep, maintenance and restoration of water bodies should be implemented with sufficient budgetary allocation. To regulate over-use of ground water for irrigation and drinking purposes, installation of water meters in all tube-wells should be made mandatory on the principle of ‘Beneficiary Pays’.
- **Contamination of ground water by industries:** Ministry of Water Resources in coordination with Central Pollution Control Board should devise an effective mechanism to identify critically polluted areas located in dark blocks. Steps to minimize and control the dumping of industrial waste into surface water and underground aquifers should also be taken.
- **Enforcement of NOCs by CGWA:** A system of regular inspections should be instituted in respect of industries to whom No Objection Certificate (NOC) has been issued by Central Ground Water Authority. This will ensure compliance of conditions mentioned in the NOC. All State Pollution Control Boards should set up an appropriate and effective monitoring mechanism to verify the requirement with the actual withdrawal.



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