

Standing Committee Report Summary

Development and Expansion of Existing and New National Inland Waterways

- The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Mr. V. Vijayasai Reddy) submitted its report on ‘Development and Expansion of Existing and New National Inland Waterways’ on September 21, 2023. An Inland waterway is a navigable river and canal system. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) regulates and develops national waterways for inland shipping and navigation. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Operationalisation of national waterways:** There are 111 notified national waterways, out of which 23 have been made operational. The Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways stated that the development of 63 national waterways is not being taken up due to financial and staffing constraints. The Committee also recommended against taking up the development of these 63 waterways at present, as it is unviable.
 - The Committee noted that five national waterways contribute to 80% of the total cargo movement. The Committee observed that the following key factors discourage companies from shifting to inland waterways: (i) slow pace of development of waterways, (ii) poor hinterland connectivity, and (iii) high vessel and equipment costs. The Committee recommended the following key measures to facilitate a modal shift: (i) financial incentives to shippers, and (ii) development of loading and unloading facilities at terminals.
 - **Intermodal connectivity for cargo movement:** The Committee noted that connectivity of waterways with major ports, rails and roads would lessen the burden on these modes and reduce the logistics costs. The Committee recommended that in the case of newly notified waterways, connectivity with rail, road, and ports should be dealt with in the project planning stage itself.
 - **Low modal share of waterways:** The modal share of waterways in India’s freight movement is about 2%, whereas the corresponding figure is 4% for USA, 14% for China, 48% for Vietnam, and 49% for Netherlands. India aims to increase the modal share to 5% by 2030. The Committee recommended the Ministry to come up with an action plan to harness the potential of waterways as a sustainable transit option and tourism product.
- **Impact on the environment:** The Committee observed that while inland waterways have a low environmental impact during operations, their development alters the ecology of the river. For instance, dredging and construction on the national waterway-I disrupted the activities of Gangetic Dolphin. The Committee recommended that IWAI should conduct environmental studies before the development of national waterways.
- **Tourism around waterways:** With a stretch of about 14,500 km of inland waterways, there exists potential for their development into tourist destinations. The Committee recommended developing a mechanism to develop tourist destinations across waterways, in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and state governments. This should include a focus on regions such as the North Eastern Region, Buckingham Canal including areas in Kadiyam, and Kerala’s backwaters. It also recommended launching river cruise operations such as Ganga Vilas to incentivise operators and promote tourism. Additionally, it recommended the integration of waterways into public transport systems such as Kochi Water Metro.
- **Increase in accidents:** The Committee noted an increase in accidents due to boat capsizing in the last two years. The reasons for such accidents are: (i) overloading of passengers, (ii) poor quality of vessels, and (iii) imbalance due to lack of proper weight distribution. The Committee recommended that IWAI set up observational network facilities at regional, state, and local levels for safe navigation and proper implementation of warning systems.
- **Digital initiatives:** The Committee took note of the digital initiatives such as river information services to support safe navigation and traffic management. It recommended that IWAI should develop a similar mobile application to support small operators who may be unable to afford more sophisticated systems.

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