

Centre proposes relaxation of coastal regulation zone norms

The Centre has allowed India's coasts to be made more accessible to tourism and industrial infrastructure and given individual States considerable leeway to decide how they should plan such development, according to a draft version of the proposed modification to India's coastal regulation zone plan made public on the Environment Ministry website on Wednesday.

The coastal regulation zone, or CRZ, 2011, refers to regions in the proximity of India's 7000-km-long shoreline where buildings, tourism facilities, industrial projects, residential facilities etc are highly regulated. In most cases it begins from the high tide line (HTL) to about 500 metres towards the landward side. The zone is subdivided into regions, with varying leeway for infrastructure development, depending on population and ecological sensitivity.

The CRZ-1, for instance, includes the most ecologically sensitive areas and according to current laws is off-limits for tourism activities and infrastructure development except for defence, strategic and rare public utilities projects.

According to the new CRZ, 2018 notification "...nature trails and eco-tourism activities..." may be permitted in CRZ-1 regions provided they conform to state-approved coastal zone management plans.

The current law, called the CRZ, 2011 also defines as 'coastal zone,' the region from the HTL to 100 m of the creek along 'tidal-influenced bodies' such as bays, estuaries, rivers, backwaters, lagoons and ponds etc. that are connected to the sea. The proposed laws relax this to 50 metres.

Earlier, rural habitations or relatively undisturbed areas close to the shore, called CRZ-II, possessed a 200 metre 'no development zone'. This has now been reduced to 50 metres, provided the area has a population density exceeding 2161 per square kilometre as per the 2011 Census.

Environmentalists say that the new regulations have been framed without a transparent public consultation process.

A committee headed by Shailesh Nayak, former secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, had framed a report to reconsider the limits of the existing coastal zone regulations.

The report however wasn't made public by the Environment Ministry. "It was only after several Right to Information requests that the policy was made available and that too, after pressure from the Central Information Commissioner," said Kanchi Kohli, researcher at the Centre for Policy Research.

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