

OFF COURSE: ON CAUVERY WATER ISSUE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

The Cauvery is a perennial source of controversies. The latest political row to erupt in Tamil Nadu is around the Centre's April 24 notification bringing the [Cauvery Water Management Authority](#) under the administrative control of the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti, which was created a year ago by combining two Ministries. Several political parties, especially the Opposition, and some farmers' associations were upset with the notification on the ground that the move has reduced the Authority to a "puppet" of the Centre. They point out that the CWMA was created on the direction of the Supreme Court in February 2018. It is also argued that between June 2018-May 2019, when the Union Ministry of Water Resources was in existence, there was no public notification on the CWMA being designated as an organisation under the Ministry. Such an argument is weak, as the CWMA, a body corporate, has been working all along under the Ministry. Even in the case of its predecessor, the [Cauvery River Authority](#) (1998-2013) with the Prime Minister as the Chairman and Chief Ministers of the basin States as Members, the Union Ministry of Water Resources had administrative control. In fact, the CWMA has had only a part-time head, the chairman of the Central Water Commission (CWC), attached to the Ministry. Besides, there are eight inter-State river water boards under the Jal Shakti Ministry. Along with the CWMA, four other bodies, including the Krishna and the Godavari Water Management Boards — which have been in existence since 2014 following the re-organisation of Andhra Pradesh — were designated to be under the Ministry. The formalisation of the CWMA's status corrects an apparent lapse on the Ministry's part and addresses administrative issues.

Apart from meeting the procedural requirement, the notification does not, in any way, alter the character, functions or powers of the CWMA that form part of a scheme drawn up a few years ago, and which was approved by the Supreme Court. If there is anything the Centre can be blamed for, it is the way the [CWMA functions](#). Even two years after its formation, the Authority does not have a full-fledged chairman. The Centre would do well to act, at least now, in making the CWMA fully operational, when the southwest monsoon is about to set in. Successive governments at the Centre have been wary of acting decisively, other than under the orders of the Supreme Court for fear of alienating voters in one of the States involved. The latest episode should convince political parties that relentless politicisation of each and every matter concerning water resources does not benefit the stakeholders. The parties should realise that electoral gains or losses are not always linked to their stand on any one issue, even if it is the Cauvery, the lifeline of Tamil Nadu's rice bowl.

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