

Report Summary

Restructuring the Central Water Commission and the Central Ground Water Board

- An Expert Committee (Chair: Dr. Mihir Shah) submitted its report on restructuring the Central Water Commission (CWC) and the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) in July 2016. The CWC is responsible for coordinating with states for the implementation of schemes for the conservation and utilisation of water resources. The CGWB is responsible for assessment of ground water resources and implementation of policies for its sustainable management.
 - The Committee recommended that the CWC and CGWB should be restructured and unified to form a new National Water Commission (NWC). It reasoned that a unified body will help in the collective management of ground and surface water. The NWC will be responsible for water policy, data and governance in the country. It should be an adjunct office of the Ministry of Water Resources and function with full autonomy.
 - The key functions of the NWC will include: (i) incentivise state governments to implement irrigation projects in reform mode, (ii) lead the national aquifer mapping and ground water management program, (iii) develop a location-specific program for rejuvenation of rivers, etc. The Committee proposed that the NWC should have eight divisions. These are:
 - **Irrigation Reform Division:** This division will assist states to focus on irrigation projects and improve water management.
 - **River Rejuvenation Division:** This division will help participatory institutions at various levels to implement region-specific programs for rejuvenation of rivers.
 - **Aquifer Mapping and Participatory Ground Water Management Division:** This division will lead the National Aquifer Management Programme for mapping and management of aquifer systems in the country. To facilitate its implementation, it will build relationships with state ground water departments, research institutions, etc. It will also assess and estimate ground water resources at the national level.
 - **Water Security Division:** This division will devise policies and programs to tackle challenges related to water security. These include: (i) ensuring the right to water for life, and (ii) protecting the agrarian economy from the impact of floods and droughts.
 - **Urban and Industrial Water Division:** This division will help devise cost-effective and appropriate technology to recycle and reuse urban and industrial waste water. It will also map aquifers in urban India and develop strategies for sustainable ground water management in cities.
 - **Water Quality Division:** This division will develop and implement programs to control pollution of water bodies and aquifers.
 - **Water Data Management and Transparency Division:** This division will create and maintain a transparent and accessible system of data management on water for public use.
 - **Knowledge Management and Capacity Building Division:** This division will be responsible for development of institutions for capacity building of water professionals in water and land management
- Other recommendations of the Committee are:
- **Irrigation Management Transfer (IMT):** States should only be involved in the development of irrigation structures, such as main systems up to secondary canals. Irrigation structures from the level of tertiary canals and below should be the responsibility of Water Users Association of farmers. IMT will improve equitable access to water by all farmers and result in 20% savings in water use.
 - **Participatory ground water management:** Ground water needs to be recognised as a common pool resource and its continuous, unchecked extraction needs to be stopped. Corrective measures such as establishing required drilling depth, distance between wells, cropping pattern that does not require over-withdrawal of the resource should be adopted.
 - **Rejuvenation of rivers:** River basins in the country are under represented by the offices of the CWC and CGWB. The proposed NWC should have offices at regional levels to cover all river basins in the country. These offices should ensure surface and ground water interdisciplinary expertise for river basin management.

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