

COASTAL REGULATION & TURTLE CONSERVATION IN INDIA

The Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 1991

Issued in 1991 by the Central Government under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986.

It declares coastal stretches as a coastal regulation zone (CRZ) and regulates activities within the CRZ (through a system of prohibition and permission of activities).

It includes the coastal stretches of seas, bays, estuaries, creeks, rivers and backwaters which are influenced by tidal action (in the landward side) upto 500 metres from the High Tide Line and the land between the HTL and the Low Tide Line (LTL)

(CRZ for rivers and creeks changed over the years and tidal influence in water bodies are areas upto 5 ppt salinity)



How sea turtles were protected by the CRZ Notification

Original intent was to regulate development along coastal stretches. This would have ensured the protection of several coastal beaches.

Areas which were sea turtle nesting areas could be declared as CRZ – I areas, which are ecologically sensitive areas. In these regions no development or new constructions could take place as per this notification.



How was the CRZ implemented?

- 19 amendments since 1991 – ushering in industrial development and rendering the CRZ meaningless

- States and U.Ts did not ensure finally approved Coastal Zone Management Plans

- No demarcation of CRZ areas on the ground till date

- Ambiguity of terms such as 'traditional inhabitants,' 'customary uses and rights,' 'roads' etc.

- Multiple interpretations from legal cases and by implementing authority

- Only recognised legal and authorised constructions of the fishing community and considered all else as unauthorised

- Numerous documented and reported violations, several more undocumented violations

- Delayed and insufficient action from authorities such as the Coastal Zone Management Authorities

- Issue of cessation of activities in private lands without compensation (result = resentment to conservation laws)

- Presently the notification is skewed in favour of industrial infrastructure; environment pushed to the backseat.

Turtles in India

* About 8000 km of coastline including the islands.

* Sporadic nesting of olive ridleys all along the mainland coast.

* 3 known mass nesting sites of the olive ridleys (in Orissa).

* Olive ridley nest along the east and west coasts.

* Greens and hawksbills in the Lakshadweep Is.

* Greens, hawksbills and leatherbacks in Andaman & Nicobar Is.



Turtles conservationists in India

International conservation/ environmental organisations. e.g. Greenpeace, WWF, IUCN etc.

Organisations with a national scope but specific field-based interventions ; often involved with policy advocacy on conservation matters . e.g. WPSI, Dakshin Foundation, BNHS, Kalpavriksh.

State level organisations, having a focus on matters within one state alone. e.g Wildlife Society of Orissa.

Local organisations; they have a local interest, focus and scope and are either student groups, groups with members of the fisher / local community. e.g SSTCN, SNM, TREE, STAP, RSTPC, GLRA, MGDYSM

Fish worker support organisations: ISCF, NFF, organisations working with fisher communities like UAA etc



Threats to sea turtles from unregulated development

- Loss of nesting beaches due to increase in built up area

- Illumination on the coast from industries, resorts and settlements

- Plantations on the coast - *Casuarina*

- Garbage and pollution of nesting beaches and offshore waters

- Sea walls and 'hard engineering options' for coastal protection

- Loss of fisherfolk rights over coastal lands results in eventual loss of nesting spaces for turtles



IMPLICATIONS OF ONGOING 'REFORMS'

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The reform process

- Ministry of Environment and Forests constitutes an Expert Committee to Review the CRZ Notification – the Swaminathan Committee

- No public consultations are held by the Committee

- CZM Notification drafted by MoEF internally – but leaked out in 2007

- Protests across the country – coastal rallies, protest actions all across the nation

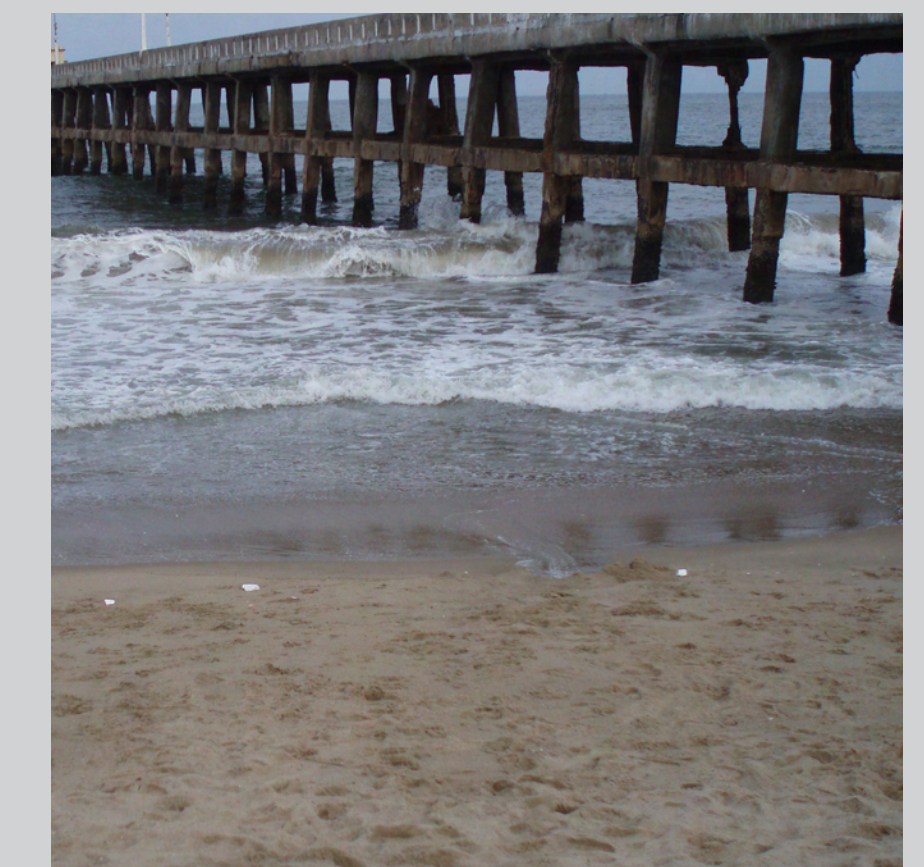
- Concept note – reneging on problematic areas and appeasing the fisher community

- Fisherfolk and environmentalists join forces - National Committee for Protection of Coasts formed. Protests continue.

- CMZ Notification, 2008 published. Protests pour in to MoEF in thousands of petitions.

- An overwhelmed MoEF shifts process to PMO's office.

- Elections round the corner. The NCPC and its constituents continue their protests. The MoEF's next move is awaited.



Coastal Management Zone Notification: Impacts on turtle conservation

Who is vulnerable?: The new law allows large scale development in all zones but a 'setback line' is preferentially used to prohibit settlements of coastal communities (declared vulnerable) but not tourism and recreation facilities! Without the traditional fishing community on the coast, these spaces are rendered open to all manner of threats for the turtles.

Fisher communities to loose space: Legitimisation of coastal development in areas that are common spaces of fisher communities.

No more prohibitions: CMZ I areas are no longer 'no development zones'. Minimal areas will be declared no development areas. This means that even turtle nesting beaches, although CMZ –I areas, will not actually receive any protection.

Namesake science: Scientific terms are peppered generously but the management finds no basis in natural or social science. No means of determining which nesting beaches need to be conserved.

Condone earlier violations of the law: This reveals more about its intent than any other clause.

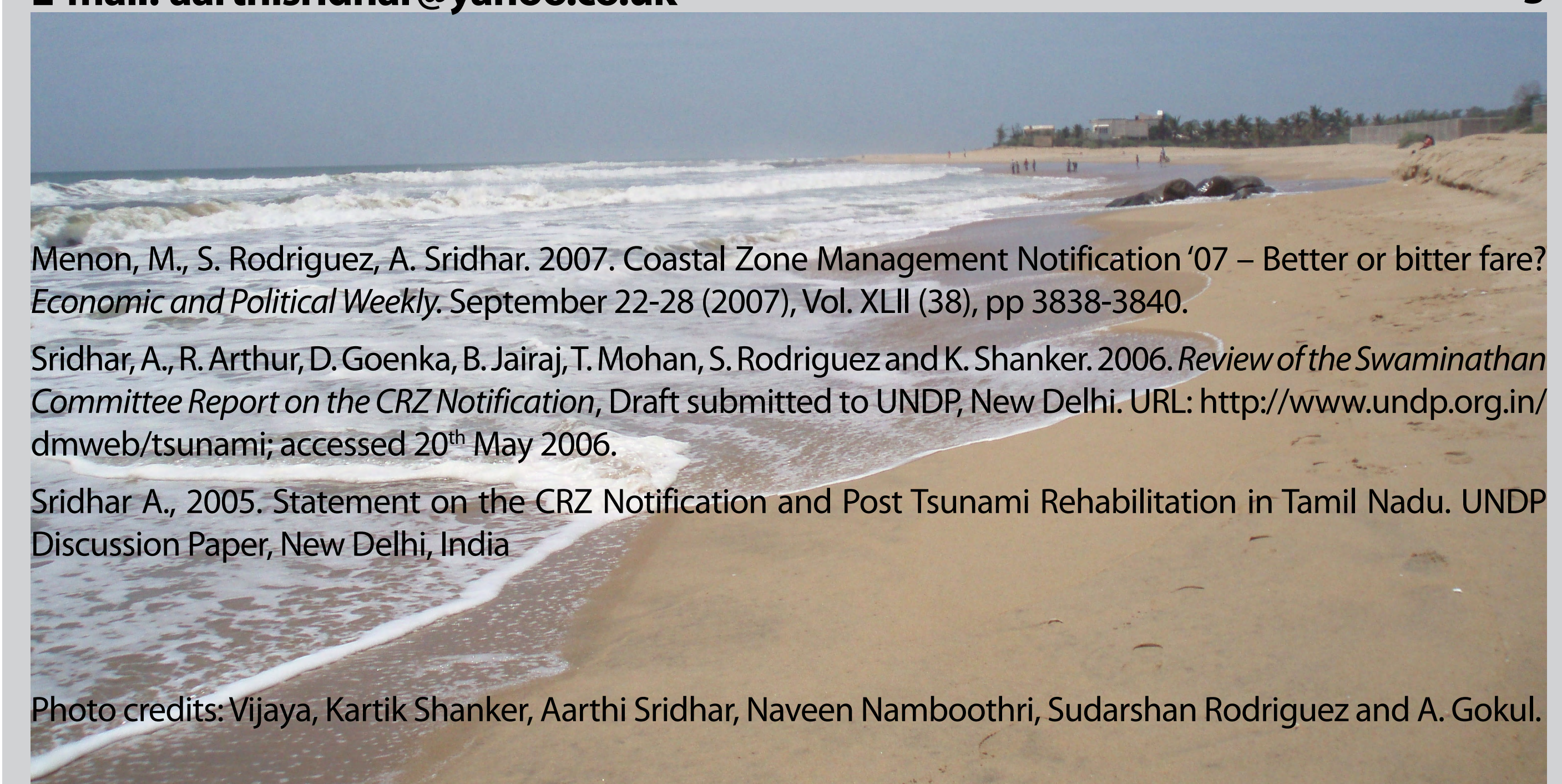
Existence of conservation groups threatened: A majority of turtle conservation groups are from local communities, living on the coast near nesting beaches. Should a law like the CMZ come into force, the very livelihoods and spaces of coastal communities become insecure and threatened. This has already made its impacts in places like Kerala where sand mining mafias have threatened turtle hatcheries and destroyed even the homes of communities conserving these by exacerbating erosion.

The future of the coast

Collaborations between turtle conservation groups, fisher communities and environmental groups to address the problem of coastal management and protection of coastal resources and spaces.

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Sridhar, A., R. Arthur, D. Goenka, B. Jairaj, T. Mohan, S. Rodriguez and K. Shanker. 2006. *Review of the Swaminathan Committee Report on the CRZ Notification*, Draft submitted to UNDP, New Delhi. URL: <http://www.undp.org.in/dmweb/tsunami>; accessed 20th May 2006.

Sridhar A., 2005. Statement on the CRZ Notification and Post Tsunami Rehabilitation in Tamil Nadu. UNDP Discussion Paper, New Delhi, India

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