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**OPINION** *do bigha zameen*

## Push Out Fisherfolk, Make Room For Water Sports?

SUDARSHAN RODRIGUEZ

**THE COASTAL REGULATION ZONE (CRZ)** notification introduced in 1991 by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) was hailed as a progressive law by most fish-worker activists and environmental groups as it recognised that coastal areas needed some form of protection from unregulated development. However, the run-in period of the CRZ notification synchronised with India's economic reforms and had a big influence on the implementation of its original objective.



Now, the MoEF is planning to introduce the Coastal Zone Management (CZM) notification to replace the CRZ notification. The new notification is presumably based on recommendations of the MS Swaminathan Committee set up by the MoEF in 2004. The Committee's report falls short on several counts and the absence of citizen participation in its drafting has been a serious concern. Proindustry influences are evident in the report.

The proposed CZM notification is yet another example of the MoEF's doublespeak on environment issues and recent policy/legal reforms. The notification espouses politically correct objectives — "sustainable development" and "conservation of ecologically and culturally significant coastal resources" — but subsequent clauses contain no indication of how these objectives will be achieved.

The protection and conservation of CZM areas is subsumed by development and economic considerations, as protection measures for CZM will be undertaken subject to "technical feasibility and costs" and only "if consistent with the provisions of the National Environment Policy (NEP)". CRZ areas under the CRZ notification were initially defined as areas where no activities would be permitted until several dilutions were introduced to change that. The proposed CZM notification builds on this regressive trend and establishes that various activities will be allowed in these sensitive ecosystems as long as they are recorded in the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plans (ICZMP).

Special Economic Zones and Notified Tourism Areas stand to gain by their presence on the notification, as CZM areas will hardly be subject to regulations. In the CZM notification, there is no concern for the rights and access of coastal communities, especially fishing communities.

The CZM notification in its present form exemplifies the recent negative trend of "regulatory capture" — a process where environmental governance is influenced by commercial lobbies and environmental laws are dictated by investment priorities.

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