

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. letter dated 15.3.2013 addressed by **Selvi J Jayalalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to **Dr. Manmohan Singh**, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India is reproduced below:

"I wish to draw your attention to a matter of great importance concerning the powers of State Governments to manage ecologically sensitive areas within their own boundaries. The Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge), Environment and Forests, Government of India, sought the views of the Government of Tamil Nadu on the report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP). This report inter alia, recommends the establishment of a Western Ghats Ecology Authority (WGEA) at the National Level with regulatory powers for approval of new projects, to issue directions to State Governments, among other things.

I would like to state emphatically that the creation of the said Authority is a gross assault on the powers of State Governments to administer ecologically sensitive areas situated within their own geographical boundaries in the name of environmental scrutiny. It seeks to create yet another redundant super body at the national level to take on and perform functions of State Institutions in the Agricultural, Forestry, Environmental and other sectors and also act as an appellate body with the authority to give directions to the State Governments. Land is a subject which comes under the State List under the Constitution of India. Any attempt by the Government of India to assume powers to regulate policy with regard to land use, developmental activities under various sectors and power to approve new projects, etc., and issue directions in the name of environment is uncalled for and can only be viewed as an encroachment on the sovereign powers of the State Governments.

I also wish to point out that Tamil Nadu has been a frontrunner in the field of nature and environmental conservation. We have enacted and implemented very stringent and effective Acts and regulations for conservation in general and for the conservation of Hill Areas, including the Western Ghats, in particular. Further, the Hill Area Conservation Authority at the State level enforces the regulations on land use in notified Hill Areas which cover the entire Western Ghats also in the State. Further, the State is scrupulously implementing various Central Acts regarding Environment and Forests with due emphasis on the conservation of the Western Ghats area. **It is relevant to point out here that the Panel report contains no materials to make out any case for any shortcoming in the conservation of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu.**

The present status of the various sectors in the State was examined vis-à-vis the recommendations of the WGEEP and it is amply clear that the State is already enforcing the implementation of the necessary regulatory mechanisms to ensure proper conservation of the Western Ghats in an integrated manner.

It is pertinent to point out that Tamil Nadu State has three Tiger Reserves, three National Parks and eight Wildlife Sanctuaries located in the Western Ghats, which are admirable models of ecological conservation. Further, Tamil Nadu is a State which has the distinction of the lowest extent (only 4416 Ha out of 2287700 Ha) of forest area diverted for non-forest purposes under the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980, during the last 33 years. Our commitment to and record of ecological protection and forest conservation are impeccable.

In these circumstances, the State is of the view that yet another regulatory mechanism in the form of the WGEA as proposed by the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel will only erode the authority of the State Government and create an unnecessary layer of authority in the name of conservation. For these reasons, the State strongly reiterates that the creation of the proposed Authority is totally unnecessary, both in terms of federal principles and in terms of ecological governance needs. I wish to add that the detailed views of the State on the recommendations of the WGEEP are being sent separately by the Environment and Forests Department to the High Level Working Group headed by Dr.K.Kasturirangan."

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