

Wildlife Governance in India

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Wildlife Governance in India: Key Takeaways from NBWL Meeting

Context

- PM Narendra Modi chaired his first-ever meeting of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) after over 10 years in office.
- The last full NBWL meeting was held on September 5, 2012, chaired by then PM Manmohan Singh.
- The meeting comes amid concerns over the NBWL's role in balancing conservation and development.

What is the NBWL?

- Established in 2003 after an amendment to The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- Apex body for:
 - Framing wildlife conservation policies.
 - Approving new national parks and sanctuaries.
 - Assessing projects affecting protected areas.
- Composition:
 - 47 members, with the Prime Minister as Chairperson.
 - Union Environment Minister as Vice-Chairperson.

Role of the NBWL Standing Committee

- Handles key tasks like appraising projects in and around forest areas.
- Decisions are recommendatory, but the Environment Ministry can overrule them.

Controversies & Criticism

1. Clearance of Controversial Projects

- Ken-Betwa River Linking Project
 - Daudhan Dam will submerge ~100 sq km of Panna Tiger Reserve, affecting its biodiversity.

- **Vedanta Oil Exploration in Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary**
 - Located in an **eco-sensitive zone**, home to **India's only ape species**, the **Hoolock Gibbon**.
- **Denotification of Galathea Bay Sanctuary (2021)**
 - A vital **nesting site for leatherback sea turtles** in **Andaman & Nicobar Islands** was removed from protection.

2. Allegations of Weakening NBWL Post-2014

- **2014: Reconstitution of NBWL under BJP Government** led to concerns over dilution of expertise.
- **Changes in Representation:**
 - **UPA Era (Pre-2014):** 7 **non-governmental members** (4 conservationists, 3 NGO representatives).
 - **Post-2014:** Only 3 **non-governmental members**, raising concerns over **independence in decision-making**.

Conclusion

PM Modi's NBWL meeting highlights **India's challenge in balancing conservation with development**. The **need for independent expert voices** and **stronger environmental safeguards** remains crucial for **wildlife protection policies**.



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