Centre plans revision of Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) guidelines

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance -Environment*

Why in News?

Recently, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) has called for a review of the guidelines governing Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs).

Eco sensitive zones (ESZ)
• **Definition** – They are *buffer areas* created around protected forests, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. • **Objectives** - To protect wildlife and biodiversity from harmful human activities. • **Prohibited Activities** - *Commercial mining,* sawmills, and industries causing pollution. • The establishment of major hydroelectric projects (HEP), • Commercial use of wood. • **Regulated Activities** - Felling of trees, *the establishment of hotels and resorts, commercial use of natural water*, erection of electrical cables, drastic change of agricultural system. • **Permitted Activities** - Ongoing *agricultural or horticultural practices,* rainwater harvesting, organic farming, use of renewable energy sources, and adoption of green technology for all activities.

- **Need for revision** – To develop a more "*flexible" and "site-specific*" approach that balances conservation goals with local socio-economic "realities".
- **Existing structure** - Current ESZ guidelines are designed primarily with terrestrial sanctuaries in mind and *often do not apply well to marine ecosystems.*

In states like Himachal Pradesh, where approximately 65% of the land is already under forest or protected status, a rigid imposition of ESZ norms could hinder local development without proportional ecological gains.

Recent recommendations

- **Flexible approach** - A more flexible and site-specific ESZ framework is essential to encourage conservation, without creating unintended hardships.
- Several members and state officials flagged concerns over the negative impact of blanket ESZ provisions.
- **Stakeholder involvement** – The proposal involves stakeholder consultations, including inputs from state governments, relevant ministries, environmental experts, and the ESZ division.
- **Complete prohibition** - The notification mentioned a complete ban on ***mining***

activities within a notified ESZ.

- **Developmental hindrance** - The committee noted that the sectors most impacted by ESZ guidelines include mining, highways, railways, housing, and tourism.
- Unlike in protected areas, where compensation is provided during the settlement of rights, no such relief exists for ESZs.
- **Inter-ministerial coordination** - A formal inter-ministerial consultation has been suggested to solicit views from all the departments concerned, before finalising any changes in the guidelines.
- **Preparation of notice** - Following the discussion, the SC-NBWL directed the environment ministry to prepare a note on the issue.
- **Submission of proposals** - The final recommendations will be submitted to the committee for further deliberations.

Reference

Business Standard | Revision of eco-sensitive zone guidelines

