Concerns with Draft National Forest Policy, 2018

What is the issue?

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The Draft National Forest Policy, 2018 published recently has omitted the diversion clause present in the National Forest Policy (NFP), 1988.

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What are the important provisions in the NFP, 1988?

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- The NFP required for most careful examination by specialists to decide upon the diversion of forest land for any non-forest purpose.
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- The Policy mandated cost-benefit analyses with respect to social and environmental factors while diverting forest land for other activities.
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- These two requirements were prerequisites before grant of any clearances for diversion of forest land.
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- In addition, the policy directs the government to totally safeguard the tropical rain/moist forests, particularly in areas like Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
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What are the concerns due to omission of diversion clause?

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- In the past years, many forest clearances were granted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change without considering the provisions of NFP.
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- Cost benefit analyses and opinion of specialists were not sought while diverting the forest lands.
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- Now with the omission of this clause in the new draft policy, it is highly likely that there will be no protection for the forests, especially in the rain forests and ecologically sensitive zones.
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- The new draft policy has changed the requirement of cost benefit analysis after the diversion of land, which previously was before any sanctions for diversions.
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- It has also altered the opinion of specialists to opinion of forest officers in the region.
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- Thus, these concerns will surely affect the health and wealth of forests in India.
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Source: The Hindu

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