New Water Extraction Guidelines

Why in news?

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The Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) has notified the new water-extraction guidelines recently.

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What does the revised guidelines reveal?

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- It has introduced the concept of Water Conservation Fee (WCF).
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- The WCF payable varies with the category of the area, type of industry and the quantum of ground water extraction.
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- It is designed to progressively increase from safe to over-exploited areas and from low to high water consuming industries as well as with increasing quantum of ground water extraction.
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- Through this design, the high rates of WCF are expected to discourage setting up of new industries in over-exploited and critical areas.
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- It also acts as a deterrent to large scale ground water extraction by industries, especially in over-exploited and critical areas.
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- The WCF would also compel industries to adopt measures relating to water use efficiency and discourage the growth of packaged drinking water units, particularly in over-exploited and critical areas.
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- It encouragesuse of recycled and treated sewage water by industries and a provision of action against polluting industries.
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- It mandates requirement of digital flow meters, piezometers and digital

water level recorders, detailing the quantum of extraction.
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- Also, water auditshould be conducted by industries abstracting ground water of 500 m3/day or more in safe and semi-critical and 200 m3/day or more in critical and over-exploited assessment units.
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- Industries should undertakeroof top rain water harvestingand measures should be adopted to ensure prevention of ground water contamination in premises of polluting industries/ projects.
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- There is also an exemption from requirement of No Objection Certificate for –
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1. Agricultural users
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2. Users employing non-energised means to extract water
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3. Individual households (using less than 1-inch diameter delivery pipe)
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- Other exemptions have been granted to strategic and operational infrastructure projects for Armed Forces, Defence and Paramilitary Forces Establishments and Government water supply agencies.
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What are the concerns?

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- **Regulation** - The guidelinesdo not make any effort to ensure efficient and need-based utilisation of water for irrigation, which uses nearly 90% of the extracted groundwater.
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- The domestic sector has also been exempted from any restrictions.
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- Only 5% groundwater that is accessed by the industrial sector is proposed to be regulated for careful use.
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- **Approval** - Some of the well-advised norms that are already in place have been relaxed for no good reason.
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- Many commercial ventures, including beverages and drinking water bottlers, do not only consume water in bulk but also waste it in substantial measure.
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- The power of issuing no objection certificates (NOC) for many kinds of industrial units has now been vested with district magistrates instead of the CGWA.
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- Since the civic authoritieslack wider perspective on this matter, they can be expected to be quite lenient in letting the commercial ventures tap it unchecked.
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- **Norm relaxation** - The existing provision for mandatory recharging of groundwater by bulk consumers has also been diluted.
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- They are now bound only to undertake rooftop water harvesting and not large-scale field projects for rainwater harvesting.
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- **Fund utilisation** - The new guidelines propose water conservation fees (WCF) on groundwater use to generate resources for the state governments' water harvesting schemes.
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- However, there is no guarantee that these funds will actually be used for this purpose.
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- **Usage cap** - Though water charges have been levied, there is no cap on water withdrawals.
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- Thus, this step will not suffice to discourage wasteful use by cash-rich consumers.
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- **Re-use** - The new rules havevirtually done away with the obligation to reuse the extracted water.
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- This will result in the rampant overexploitation of this resource, causing a sharp dip in water table in many areas.
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What should be done?

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- India is already the world’s largest user of groundwater, tapping annually about 253 billion cubic metres (BCM) of water.
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- This is equivalent to 25% of yearly withdrawals at the global level.
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- As many as 1,034 of India’s total 6,584 groundwater blocks have already been categorised as “over-exploited”.
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- Among the rest, 253 blocks are in “critical” and 681 in “semi-critical” categories and some others hold only saline water.
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- Water tapping in these areas needs to be kept below the level of annual recharge through natural or artificial means.
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- However, the recent guidelines are unlikely to help check wasteful and injudicious use of rapidly vanishing groundwater because of several loopholes.
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- Thus, exceptional care is needed not only to thwart its indiscriminate use but also to incentivise its replenishment with rainwater.
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- Otherwise, large parts of the country would soon face severe shortage of water even for domestic and drinking purposes.
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Source: Business Standard

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