

“New coastal management plan jeopardises livelihood of fishermen”

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: India's 8,118-km coastline and the livelihood of 3.5 million people who depend on fishing in its waters will be threatened if the government presses ahead with its plan to replace the protective measures of the coastal regulation laws of 1991 with a new management concept, the National Fishworkers Forum has said.

The Coastal Management Zone draft notification, which is posted on the website of the Ministry of Environment and Forests for public comment till June 29, splits coastal zones into four categories: ecologically sensitive, of particular concern (population dense or economically and strategically significant), open areas (including water) and island areas such as Andaman and Lakshadweep.

The new plan gives too much power to the State authorities to waive the rights of

fishermen and hand over coastal land and water to big business interests engaged in tourism, mariculture, mineral mining, shipping, energy processing and defence-related projects, Harekrishna Debnath, chairman of the forum, said here on Thursday.

Furthermore, he said, the plan would legalise thousands of violations that took place under the 1991 coastal regulation zone notification, many of which were pending in court.

“Facing crisis”

“Our coastal zone is facing a crisis. In all States, fishermen are experiencing a drastic reduction in their catch owing to pollution, the destruction of mangroves and industrial effluents,” he said. Yet, the fisheries sector contributed Rs.30,000 crore to India's gross national product for little or no investment from the government.

Flanked by representatives

from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh who are leading a fisherfolk yatra that has moved through two-thirds of India's coastline from the Rann of Kutch to Chennai through Kanyakumari, he demanded that the government withdraw the draft management notification and implement the 1991 notification until comprehensive legislation that takes into account the perspectives of all parties is in place.

The Machhimar Adhikar Rashtriya Abhiyan, which will move on from Chennai up the east coast to Kolkata, is calling for a National Day of Action on June 20 to enable the fisherfolk to voice their concerns and petition the Environment Ministry.

In the absence of any response, thousands of fisherfolk may go to Delhi on the opening day of Parliament on July 22 for an indefinite agitation.