

**Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Technical Committee  
of State Wetland Authority Kerala (SWAK) held  
on 16.10.2023 in Hybrid Mode**

The meeting started at 11.00 a.m. with Dr. Rathan U. Kelkar IAS, Secretary, Environment Department in the Chair. The Member Secretary, State Wetland Authority Kerala, Sri. Suneel Pamidi IFS was present.

The following members were present:

1. Dr. Harikumar P. S., Former Senior Principal Scientist and Head, Water Quality Division, CWRDM (Online)
2. Dr. Dinesan V. P., Former Senior Principal Scientist & Head, Geomatics Division, CWRDM (Physical)
3. Dr. Manoj P. Samuel, Executive Director, CWRDM (Online)
4. Dr. Dinesan Cheruvat IAS, Joint MD, Kerala Water Authority (Physical)
5. Dr. John C. Mathew, Environment Programme Manager, DoECC (Physical) -Convener

The Chairman welcomed the committee members and the agenda items were presented by the Member Secretary. After a detailed discussion, the committee took the following decisions:

**Agenda No. 1**

**Brief Documents of the first 20 wetlands prepared as part of the notification of Wetlands in the State for review [SWAK/A1/1/2017]**

As per Rule 5 of the Wetlands (Conservation & Management) Rules, 2017, SWAK had to prepare a list of wetlands to be notified, within one year from the date of publication of the rules. Space Application Centre (SAC) had already prepared the list of 1762 wetlands in the State that were included in the Wetland Atlas of Kerala and published by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change. From these 1762 wetlands, KSREC had initially submitted a draft list of 456 wetlands in Kerala that fall under the purview of Wetlands (Conservation & Management) Rules 2017, excluding the wetlands falling in areas covered under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the State Forest Acts, and the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2011.

Out of those 456 wetlands, KSREC had selected 60 wetlands to be notified in the State. This list was placed in the meeting of SWAK held on 15.02.2018 and it was decided that the list of Wetlands to be notified should be finalized only after ground truthing and the final list of wetlands should be placed before the next meeting of SWAK for decision and onward submission to MoEF&CC.

Based on the above decision, out of the 60 wetlands to be notified, KSREC conducted the ground truthing /field verification jointly with the team of SWAK for the 17 wetlands that are doubtful and submitted their draft report.

The Technical Committee Meeting of SWAK held on 24.01.2019 decided that the list of wetlands to be notified and the brief documents of all the wetlands need to be re-drafted in the format provided by MoEF&CC in the Guidelines for the Implementation of Wetlands (Conservation & Management) Rules, 2017 and the same has to be placed in the next SWAK meeting for approval and onward transmission to MoEF&CC.

KSREC had re-submitted the draft list of wetlands incorporating comments of the meeting of the Technical Committee held on 24.01.2019 and was placed before the technical committee meeting of SWAK held on 05.10.2019. The committee approved the draft list of 40 wetlands proposed to be notified along with their boundary details and the draft comprehensive list of 10971 wetlands (186 wetlands and 10785 paddy lands) prepared by KSREC.

The draft list of 40 wetlands proposed to be notified along with their boundary details for releasing Draft Gazette Notification by Government of Kerala and draft comprehensive list of 10971 wetlands (186 wetlands and 10785 paddy lands), all prepared by KSREC were placed in the SWAK Authority meeting held on 18.06.2020 chaired by Hon'ble Chief Minister of Kerala. The decision taken in the meeting was:

*"A consultation and discussion shall be conducted with Local Self Governments including matters related to the boundary, survey numbers, zone of influence, restricted activities, permitted activities. Based on the concurrence of local bodies, SWAK shall take a decision on this notification".*

As per the above decision, letters were given to all concerned district collectors to convene consultative meetings with the local bodies around the respective wetlands in their district as per the draft list.

The representatives from SWAK and Kerala State Remote Sensing Centre (KSREC) were assigned to present the above notification process details and wetland maps and boundary details in the consultative meetings at the district level. The local governments presidents, ward members, secretaries, and revenue officials including the village officers and taluk officers are invited to attend these consultative meetings. The draft maps with boundary

details, brief documents of each wetland were shared to the respective collectorates and from there with the respective Taluks, Villages, and Local Governments for their comments, corrections, and inputs.

Consequently, the Brief Documents of the first 20 wetlands out of the total 40 wetlands in the State were drafted based on the available data on wetland characteristics that are necessary to fill up the document. For this, the wetlands were visited by the SWAK team and collected details from nearby inhabitants and wetland-dependent communities. The maps of the wetlands and Zone of Influences were already prepared by KSREC and revisions were made as per the comments from SWAK. Also, consultation meetings with District Administrations and LSGs were carried out in the Months of March and April 2023 for the 20 wetlands proposed to be notified in the first phase. The brief documents were presented elaborately before the LSG secretaries and Village Officers of the corresponding Wetlands during the meeting. The issues raised during consultations were addressed and the brief documents were placed before the technical committee meeting of SWAK held on 16.10.2023.

*The committee discussed the matter and Dr. V. P. Dinesan suggested including maximum data on the wetland hydrological processes and flood mitigation in the brief documents, if available readily. Dr. Dinesan Cheruvat opined that the fisheries resource conservation measures can be incorporated during the preparation of Integrated Management Plans. Dr. Harikumar said that the brief documents have the data stipulated in the guidelines. The Committee decided to approve the brief documents and forward them to the Authority.*

### **Agenda No. 2**

**Draft Offline Ramsar Information Sheet of Vellayani wetland, Akkulam-Veli wetland, Kottuli wetland and Kattampally-Valapattanam-Kuppam wetland complex as part of the Ramsar designation [SWAK/A1/343/2023]**

India ratified the Ramsar convention in the year 1982 by designating Keoladeo National Park and Chilika as the first two sites on the Ramsar List. Kerala has designated three Wetlands to the List in the year 2002. The number of Ramsar sites in India is currently 75, the highest in Asia.

#### **Need for Ramsar Designation**

1. Ramsar site designation of a wetland brings top priority for its conservation and management activities.

2. The site will attract externally aided funds for its Management (Eg:- Sasthamkotta Wetland).
3. Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) will be used to monitor the management status of the wetland.
4. Ramsar sites often attract tourists interested in experiencing and appreciating the unique biodiversity and natural beauty of wetlands. Responsible tourism can contribute to local economies while generating funds for conservation and community development projects.
5. The Ramsar site designation raises public awareness about the importance of wetlands and their conservation. It encourages education and research, fostering a better understanding of wetland ecosystems and their role in sustaining life.

Currently SWAK team prepared the draft Offline Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) for Vellayani wetland, Akkulam-Veli wetland, Kottuli wetland and Kattampally-Valapttanam-Kuppam wetland complex as part of the initial process of the Ramsar designation. This was carried out by incorporating maximum available information from several sources including recently updated Brief Documents, consultation with stakeholders, and published literature. These have to be forwarded to MoEF&CC through the Government of Kerala after the approval of SWAK. The RISs for the four wetlands were placed before the technical committee meeting.

*The committee verified the four RISs and recommended forwarding them to the Authority for further approval. Dr. Harikumar and Dr. V. P. Dinesan highlighted the importance of the Kavvayi-Karattuvayal-Kanichira wetland complex which would be a suitable wetland to be recognized as a Ramsar wetland in the State. The committee decided to consider this wetland complex for Ramsar designation in the next phase.*

### **Agenda No. 3**

#### **Clarification on Ramsar Boundary and proposed draft notification boundary as per Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 of Vembanad-Kol Ramsar wetland [SWAK/A1/192/2023]**

Vembanad-Kol Ramsar Wetland is a vast system spread over 4 districts in the State. The wetland was designated as a Ramsar site in the year 2002 and the current Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017, came into force in the year 2017. The Ramsar boundary covers major human-inhabited areas in the wetland's floodplains. However, the proposed draft boundary for the notification of the Vembanad-Kol wetland complex, based

on the guidelines of the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 does not include the above mentioned human-inhabited areas.

The definition of the wetland as per Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017 is;

*'an area of marsh, fen, peatland or water; whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters, but does not include river channels, paddy fields, human-made water bodies/tanks specifically constructed for drinking water purposes and structures specifically constructed for aquaculture, salt production, recreation and irrigation purposes'*

Major differences between the Ramsar boundary and the draft wetland notification boundary are shown below.

1. As per the Ramsar boundary, the total area covered is about 151250 ha and in the case of the proposed notification boundary, it is 24565.66 ha. which covers only the estuary and connecting waterbodies
2. Since paddy lands do not come under wetlands, the entire Kuttanad area is not included in the proposed wetland notification boundary including several human inhabited areas.
3. The densely populated Kumarakom reach and nearby paddy fields comprise a large area of the Ramsar boundary of the Vembanad-Kol.
4. Paddy lands in the Kaduthuruthy-Vaikom area also contribute to the Ramsar boundary.
5. Pokkali paddy fields in the Vayalar and paddy lands near Thruppunithura were also included in the Ramsar boundary
6. Paddy lands in Kol areas like Mukundapuram and Vendkidangu were included in the Ramsar boundary of the wetland (See map on the next page, Fig-1)

Even though the definition excludes paddy fields and human-made water bodies, the rule is applicable to *'wetlands categorised as 'wetlands of international importance' under the Ramsar Convention'*. Currently, SWAK is considering applications for permitting permanent constructions within 50 meters from the mean high flood level observed during 2007-2017, based on the Ramsar Boundary only. This may be reviewed based on the above definition of wetlands in the Wetland Rules, 2017, and the guidelines for demarcating the wetland boundary as per Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017. The item was placed before the technical committee.

*The committee discussed various aspects of the issue and decided to defer the matter for a detailed analysis of the modified boundaries, regulations applicable, and their implications.*


**Agenda No. 4**

**Draft Integrated Management Plan of Vembanad-Kol Ramsar wetland complex, prepared in association with Centre for Water Resource Development and Management (CWRDM) and Wetlands International South Asia (WISA) [SWAK/A1/102/2018]**

SWAK has prepared the Draft Integrated Management Plan (IMP) of Vembanad-Kol Ramsar wetland complex, in association with the Centre for Water Resource Development and Management (CWRDM) and Wetlands International South Asia (WISA). The plan was prepared by multiple consultations with the stakeholders and rigorous field visits. The Wetland is divided into three Zones for the easiness of the management activities and their successful implementation. The Ramsar boundary of the wetland complex has been considered as the wetland boundary for the preparation of the IMP. After the multilevel consultation meetings with different stakeholders conducted in and around the wetland, a final meeting with major Implementing Departments was carried out at State Wetland Authority Kerala and finalized the Plan. The comments, suggestions, and modifications were incorporated in this draft IMP.

*Dr. V. P. Dinesan observed that the activities in the action plan should be prioritized based on fund availability. The Vembanad-Kol Wetland Management Unit (VKWMU) proposed in the IMP should be the agency to prioritize and implement the activities in the field and recommended giving more priority to livelihood components. The committee decided to recommend and forward the IMP to the Authority for approval.*

The meeting concluded at 12.40 p.m. with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

  
Chairman  
**Dr. Rathan U. Kelkar IAS**  
Secretary  
Environment Department  
Govt. Secretariat  
Thiruvananthapuram.