

Draft National Water Policy (2012) Released for Comments

In pursuance of the strategies identified in National Water Mission Document as well as deliberations in National Water Board, Ministry of Water Resources had initiated the process of reviewing the National Water Policy, 2002. Accordingly, the Drafting Committee on National Water Policy has evolved the draft policy after taking into consideration recommendations of various stake holders. The Salient Features of Draft National Water Policy (NWP, 2012) are:

1. Even while recognizing that the States have the right to frame suitable policies, laws and regulations on water, the draft NWP, 2012 lays emphasis on the need for a national water framework law, comprehensive legislation for optimum development of inter-State rivers and river valleys, public trust doctrine, amendment of the Indian Easements Act, 1882, etc.
2. Basic minimum quantity for essential health & hygiene and sustenance of ecology has been defined as pre-emptive need, which must be ensured. Water has been recognized as economic good, over and above pre-emptive need, for the first time, which would promote maximization of value of water and its conservation and efficient use.
3. The draft NWP, 2012 presents a holistic picture of ecological need of the river rather than restricting it to only minimum flow requirement. It states that the ecological needs of the river should be determined recognizing that river flows are characterized by low or no flows, small floods (freshets), large floods and flow variability and should accommodate development needs. A portion of river flows should be kept aside to meet ecological needs ensuring that the proportional low and high flow releases correspond in time closely to the natural flow regime.
4. The draft NWP, 2012 recognizes the need to adapt to climate change scenario in planning and implementation of water resources projects. Coping strategies for designing and management of water resources structures and review of acceptability criteria has been emphasized.
5. Need and approaches towards enhancing water availability have been stipulated. Direct use of rainfall and avoidance of inadvertent evapo-transpiration have been proposed as the new additional strategies for augmenting utilizable water resources.
6. Mapping of the aquifers to know the quantum and quality of ground water resources (replenishable as well as non-replenishable) in the country has been proposed with provision of periodic updation.
7. Water use efficiency has been emphasized. A system to evolve benchmarks for water uses for different purposes, i.e., water footprints, and water auditing should be developed to ensure efficient use of water. Project financing has been suggested as a tool to incentivize efficient & economic use of water.
8. Provision of setting up of Water Regulatory Authority and adequate water pricing to incentivize recycle and re-use has been specified.
9. Water Users Associations should be given statutory powers to collect and retain a portion of water charges, manage the volumetric quantum of water allotted to them and maintain the distribution system in their jurisdiction.

10. The draft NWP, 2012 proposes reversal of heavy under-pricing of electricity, which leads to wasteful use of both electricity and water.
11. The draft NWP, 2012 recognizes encroachment and diversion of water bodies and emphasizes the need for their restoration with community participation.
12. The draft NWP, 2012 proposes setting aside a suitable percentage of the costs of infrastructure development, which along with collected water charges, may be utilized for repair and maintenance. Contract for construction of projects should have inbuilt provision for longer periods of proper maintenance and handing over back the infrastructure in good condition.
13. *Pari-passu* planning and execution of all components of water resources projects have been proposed so that intended benefits start accruing immediately after completion and there is no gap between potential created and potential utilized.
14. All water resources projects, including hydro power projects, should be planned to the extent feasible as multi-purpose projects with provision of storage to derive maximum benefit from available topology and water resources.
15. Project affected families to be made partners in progress and given a share in the benefits comparable to project benefitted families, who may bear part of the cost of resettlement & rehabilitation through adequate pricing.
16. The draft NWP, 2012 lays emphasis on preparedness for flood / drought with coping up mechanisms as an option. Frequency based flood inundation maps should be prepared to evolve coping strategies.
17. There is a need to remove the large disparity between stipulations for water supply in urban areas and in rural areas to bring equality between rural and urban people.
18. The draft NWP, 2012 proposes a forum at the national level to deliberate upon issues relating to water and evolve consensus, co-operation and reconciliation amongst party States. A similar mechanism should be established within each State to amicably resolve differences in competing demands for water amongst different users of water, as also between different parts of the State.
19. The “Service Provider” role of the state should be gradually shifted to that of a regulator of services and facilitator for strengthening the institutions responsible for planning, implementation and management of water resources. The water related services should be transferred to community and / or private sector with appropriate “Public Private Partnership” model.
20. Appropriate institutional arrangements for each river basin should be developed to collect and collate all data on regular basis with regard to rainfall, river flows, area irrigated by crops and by source, utilizations for various uses by both surface and ground water and to publish water accounts on ten daily basis every year for each river basin with appropriate water budgets and water accounts based on the hydrologic balances.
21. The darft NWP, 2012 proposes negotiations about sharing and management of water of international rivers on bilateral basis in consultative association with riparian States keeping paramount the national interests.

22. All hydrological data other than those classified as secret on national security consideration should be in public domain. Setting up of a National Water Informatics Center has been proposed.
23. Continuing research and advancement in technology should be promoted to address the issues in water sector in a scientific manner. Innovations in water resources sector should be recognized and awarded. A center for research in water policy should also be established to evolve policy directives for changing scenario of water resources.
24. It is necessary to give adequate grants to the States to update technology, design practices, planning and management practices, preparation of annual water balances and accounts for the site and basin, preparation of hydrologic balances for water systems, and benchmarking and performance evaluation.

The series of consultation meetings held to evolve the draft policy were as follows;

1. With Hon'ble Members of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources, Consultative Committee for Ministry of Water Resources and Parliamentary Forum on Water Conservation and Management on 28th July, 2010, at New Delhi.
2. With Academia, Experts and Professionals on 26th October, 2010 at New Delhi.
3. With Non-Governmental Organizations held on 11th & 12th January, 2011 at New Delhi.
4. With Corporate Sector held on 21st March, 2011 at New Delhi.
5. With representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions on 16th June, 2011 at Hyderabad, on 30th June, 2011 at Shillong, on 14th July, 2011 at Jaipur and on 2nd November, 2011 at Pune.

The Drafting Committee comprising of Dr. S.R. Hashim, former Member, Planning Commission and Chairman, Union Public Service Commission; Prof. Subhash Chander, former Professor, IIT, Delhi; Shri A.D. Mohile, former Chairman, Central Water Commission; and Shri S.C. Jain, an expert from an NGO was constituted for drafting of the National Water Policy. This Committee was supported by a team of officers from Ministry of Water Resources, Central Water Commission, Central Ground Water Board, National Rainfed Area Authority; National Institute of Hydrology and Planning Commission.

Considering the recommendations and feedback received during various consultation meetings, the Drafting Committee identified basic concerns in water resources sector and adopted basic principles which should be followed to address those concerns, and accordingly, evolved draft policy recommendations.

The draft National Water Policy (2012) has also been put up on the website of Ministry of Water Resources <http://wrmin.nic.in> and arrangement is being made to facilitate posting of online comments/suggestions. The comments may also be mailed to nwp2012-mowr@nic.in.

The draft National Water Policy, 2012 shall remain open for comments till 29th February, 2012. After carrying necessary modifications, it would be placed before National Water Board and National Water Resources Council for finalization and adoption.