



**SAVE THE WESTERN GHATS  
CONCLAVE 2012  
'PRACTITIONERS'  
CONCLAVE'**

**POLICY BENCH ON WESTERN GHATS ECOLOGY EXPERT PANEL REPORT**

**PART 1- PREPARATORY SESSION**

**SLOT: 12.15PM TO 1PM DAY 1**

**FORMAT: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

**PART 2- DELIBERATIVE SESSION**

**SLOT: 9AM TO 11AM**

This session aims at bringing in all the stakeholders concerned with the policies regarding both development and conservation in the Western Ghats to debate the burning issues surrounding the report of the expert environmental panel. This bench shall find representation starting from the government, NGO/NPOs, members of the panel, conservationists, activists, environmental journalists and members of the local communities. Through the debate we shall aim to come to a comprehensive policy that could be ideal to conserve the environmental integrity of the Western Ghats without stalling the process of development in the area.

This keynote session shall be divided into 2 parts. The first part will be a preparatory session aiming at circulating information about the findings and suggestions enlisted in the WGEEP report. The second part will be the policy bench where these findings will be deliberated upon and debated.

In this preparatory session, we shall present before all the delegates, the findings of the WGEEP report. Since, this report is highly technical and covers many dimensions, it is extremely important to present the findings in a more coherent and condensed manner. This shall help the delegates clarify the doubts regarding various aspects of the report, understand the importance of the report



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recommendations and also get an idea of the position of the report and its implementation in the present day. We shall also discuss the civil society and government reactions to the report. This exercise is highly crucial to empower the delegates to take part in the WGEEP Report Policy Bench on Day 3 of the conclave in a more informed manner. This preparatory session will build up to a more enabling and enlightening Policy Bench on this contentious and controversial report.

In the second session on Day 3, the bench comprising of members of the WGEE Panel, the government, industrialists, activists and members of the Civil Society will deliberate upon the findings to chalk out a future way ahead in which the report findings can be used optimally. The audience perspectives and reactions will also find ample space making the session more enriching and inclusive. The objective behind such a session is to concretely establish a way ahead in which the report findings do not become a futile exercise and adequate opportunities are established for further action.

Scroll down for the *Session Brief*.



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**Policy Bench on Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel Report: Session Brief**

The Save the Western Ghats Group meeting at Kotagiri in the year 2010 can be considered a milestone in the history of civil society activism for the conservation of the endangered Western Ghats. Kotagiri saw the formation of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), announced by the then Environment Minister, Mr. Jairam Ramesh. This declaration was the beginning towards acknowledging the threat to this biodiversity hotspot and taking some institutional measures to derail the practices of devastation being followed in this region. The Western Ghats is spread across 6 Indian states and lies at the heart of the ecosystem and is the social, cultural and financial security of many indigenous groups residing here. The over exploitation of these mountains and rampant, mindless development efforts are directly affecting the lives of many species which have made the Western Ghats their home and the livelihoods of people, who are dependent on nature. These concerns were being aired by the Civil Society Groups working in this area for a long time. They were constantly trying to bring the issues concerning the Western Ghats to the public gaze, to the limelight so that it can draw the attention of the authorities and capture the consciousness of the masses. After years of lobbying and single minded effort, their endeavors' paid off resulting in the formation of this expert panel. But, that was just the beginning of a long journey and there is still a long way to go towards a fruitful end. The Save the Western Ghats group also provided critical inputs during the study period so as to make the report more inclusive and thorough, chronicling every aspect of reality in the Ghats.

After almost a year of the Study and under the able stewardship of Prof. Madhav Gadgil, the report was finally ready on August 2011. But mired in controversies and vociferously opposed by Industrial houses and well as state Governments, the report was released in the public domain after a long hiatus. After intense civil society pressure and public interest litigations, the WGEEP Report was finally released on May 2012 with a disclaimer by the Ministry saying that the contents of the report are not binding. A 45 day period was given to the general public to send in their opinions, recommendations and suggestions on the report, to the panel. The WGEEP Report has divided the Entire Western Ghats into Ecological Sensitive Zone 1, 2 and 3 based on the critical studies undertaken throughout the area and has delineated a set of rules



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to be followed for all developmental projects in the 3 areas. It also laid down a broader framework for the formation of the Western Ghats Ecological Authority.

The contentious aspects of the Report which has earned it the ire of the Industry and State Governments is that it has laid out an indefinite moratorium on new clearances to mining and no new establishment of red and orange category industries in ESZ 1 and 2. It has also suggested a gradual phasing away of existing mining by 2016. The report has also commented on the controversial Athirapally and Gundia Projects by saying that all dams and hydroelectric projects should not be allowed on rivers flowing through ESZ 1 and 2.

This Policy Bench shall include members of the WGEE Panel, representatives from the Government and Civil Society Organizations, Activists and members of the industry to deliberate upon how the recommendations of the panel stand justified to the concerns of the Western Ghats and the pros and cons of implementing these recommendations. This Policy Bench shall try to discuss the repercussions and implications of translating the report into an implementable policy and try to bring in their specialized inputs and suggestions to make it more inclusive. We shall deliberate upon questions of development vis-à-vis conservation and where the Panel report stands on this continuum.

In the light of the importance of this report in the history of activism for the cause of the Western Ghats and the crucial significance of disseminating the contents of its findings to each concerned person, this session has been accorded primary significance in our Conclave. It is the introductory session and we are hoping to emerge with a concrete consensus on this controversial report. Even if consensus is an illusion, this session hopes to educate and enable the maximum number of people to critically understand this report and help in forming their own, informed decisions regarding the Western Ghats and its future.

Each Speaker will be given 20 minutes to speak. The session is mostly interactive and will continue in the format of debates and cross questions.