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# CWMA Directs Karnataka to Release Cauvery Water Amid Distress-Year Monsoon and Basin-Wide Water Scarcity

Published On: 03-08-2026

## Recent Developments:

- The **Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)** has endorsed the **Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC)** recommendation directing **Karnataka** to release **3,500 cusecs** of water to **Tamil Nadu** for **15 days (29 July–12 August 2026)**, amounting to nearly **4.5 thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft)**. This decision was taken in view of severe rainfall deficiency and basin-wide hydrological stress.
- The decision has revived the long-standing **Cauvery River water-sharing dispute**, with **Karnataka** citing inadequate water availability while **Tamil Nadu** has demanded release of the full deficit quantity determined by the monitoring mechanism.

## Cauvery Water Dispute:

### *About:*

- The **Cauvery River** is an **inter-State river** shared by **Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala**, and the **Union Territory of Puducherry**.
- The dispute primarily concerns the **equitable allocation** of river water for **irrigation, drinking water**, and **ecological sustainability**, particularly during years of deficient monsoon rainfall.
- The dispute is governed through a statutory institutional mechanism established under the **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956**, following the **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)** Award and subsequent directions of the **Supreme Court**.

## Institutional Framework for Cauvery Water Management:

### *Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA):*

- The **CWMA** was established in **2018** under the **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956** to implement the **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal Award (2007)** as modified by the **Supreme Court (2018)**.
- It functions under the **Union Ministry of Jal Shakti** as the principal statutory authority responsible for implementing water-sharing arrangements among the basin States.

### *Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC):*

- The **CWRC** functions as the technical and regulatory arm of the **CWMA**.
- The Committee is headquartered in **New Delhi** and is chaired by the **Member (Water Resources), CWMA**.
- Members include:
- **Chief Engineers** of all **Cauvery Basin States**.

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- Representatives from the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**, **Central Water Commission (CWC)**, and **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare**.

### ***Functions of CWRC:***

- Monitors daily **reservoir storage**, **river inflows**, and **water levels** in major reservoirs across the basin.
- Ensures implementation of **daily** and **monthly water release schedules** approved by the **CWMA**.
- Prepares **seasonal** and **annual water accounts** for basin management.
- Conducts **fortnightly reviews** during the monsoon to assess compliance and changing hydrological conditions.
- Provides scientific recommendations for water releases during both normal and distress years.

### **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT):**

#### ***About:***

- The **Government of India** constituted the **CWDT** on **2 June 1990** under the **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956**.
- The Tribunal delivered its **final award in 2007**, which was modified by the **Supreme Court in 2018** while retaining the institutional framework for implementation.

### **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:**

#### ***Constitutional Basis:***

- The Act has been enacted under **Article 262** of the **Constitution of India**.
- It empowers the **Parliament** to provide for adjudication of disputes relating to the use, distribution and control of waters of inter-State rivers and river valleys.
- **Article 262(2)** authorises Parliament to exclude the jurisdiction of the **Supreme Court** and other courts over such disputes through legislation.

#### ***Salient Features:***

- Provides for the constitution of **Water Disputes Tribunals**.
- Prescribes institutional mechanisms for adjudication and implementation of tribunal awards.
- Promotes cooperative federalism through negotiated and legally enforceable water-sharing arrangements.

### **How Does CWRC Determine Water Releases?**

#### ***Scientific Assessment Framework:***

- The **CWRC** follows a **hydro-meteorological assessment** instead of rigid water allocation during distress years.
- Major parameters considered include:
  - **Rainfall received, IMD rainfall forecasts.**
  - **Live reservoir storage.**
  - **Reservoir inflows and outflows.**
  - **River discharge at Biligundulu**, the inter-State gauging station.
  - **Intermediate catchment inflows.**
- Compliance with previous release directions.
- The scientific assessment seeks to balance **drinking water**, **irrigation requirements**, and **environmental flows**.

### **Reasons Behind the Latest Water Release Decision:**

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### ***Hydrological Conditions:***

- Net inflows into Karnataka reservoirs were approximately **60% below** the **30-year average**.
- River discharge at **Biligundulu** recorded nearly a **90% deficit**, indicating severe basin-wide stress.
- **IMD** projected continued weak southwest monsoon rainfall, reducing prospects for future inflows.
- Combined storage in Karnataka's four major reservoirs stood at **64.15 tmc ft** against a designed capacity of **114.57 tmc ft**.
- Considering these conditions, the Committee recommended a limited but operationally feasible release while attempting to address Tamil Nadu's immediate agricultural requirements.

### **Positions of the Riparian States:**

#### ***Karnataka's Position:***

- Karnataka has not commenced large-scale irrigation releases because of inadequate rainfall.
- The State considers the directed release difficult to implement under prevailing drought-like conditions.
- The Government is examining the possibility of approaching the **CWMA** for reconsideration.
- Farmers' organisations have demanded adoption of a **distress-sharing formula** instead of fixed allocations.

#### ***Tamil Nadu's Position:***

- Tamil Nadu considers the released quantity inadequate.
- The State maintains that Karnataka should release the entire **9.8 tmc ft** deficit assessed by the monitoring committee.
- The **Kuruvai cultivation season** requires nearly **100 tmc ft** of water for approximately **4 lakh acres**.
- Storage in the **Mettur Reservoir** remains constrained, while a substantial quantity must be reserved for **drinking water** and **dead storage**.

### **Major Challenges:**

#### ***Institutional Challenges:***

- The basin lacks a mutually accepted **distress-sharing formula** applicable during deficient rainfall years.
- Recurring disputes continue despite the existence of statutory institutions.

#### ***Hydrological Challenges:***

- Climate variability has increased uncertainty regarding monsoon rainfall and river flows.
- Reservoir management has become increasingly complex because of changing rainfall patterns.

#### ***Competing Water Demands:***

- Drinking water security, agricultural irrigation and ecological flow requirements often compete during drought years.
- States face difficulty in balancing legal allocations with actual water availability.

#### ***Political Challenges:***

- Water disputes frequently generate inter-State political tensions.
- Public sentiment and farmers' interests often influence governmental responses to tribunal and authority decisions.

### **Way Forward:**

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### ***Institutional Reforms:***

- Develop a mutually agreed **distress-sharing formula** based on proportional reduction in water allocations during drought years.
- Strengthen the authority of the **CWMA** through timely implementation of its decisions.

### ***Scientific Water Governance:***

- Expand **real-time hydrological monitoring**, satellite-based observation and transparent data sharing.
- Improve seasonal forecasting through stronger coordination with the **India Meteorological Department**.

### ***Demand-Side Water Management:***

- Promote **micro-irrigation, crop diversification**, water-efficient agriculture and basin-level **Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)**.
- Encourage scientific reservoir operation and conjunctive use of surface and groundwater.

### ***Cooperative Federalism:***

- Strengthen continuous dialogue among **Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry**, and the **CWMA**.
- Institutionalise periodic basin reviews to ensure adaptive water allocation under changing climatic conditions.

### **Conclusion:**

- The **Cauvery dispute** demonstrates that sustainable river basin governance requires a balance between **constitutional federalism, scientific hydrology, climate resilience, and equitable resource sharing**.
- A transparent, science-based and cooperative institutional framework remains essential for ensuring long-term water security and reducing recurring inter-State conflicts.

### **Value Addition for UPSC:**

#### ***Important Constitutional and Legal Provisions:***

- **Article 262** – Adjudication of **inter-State river water disputes**.
- **Entry 17, State List** – Water, subject to **Entry 56 of the Union List**.
- **Entry 56, Union List** – Regulation and development of **inter-State rivers** in the public interest.
- **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956** – Statutory mechanism for adjudication of river water disputes.
- **Cauvery Water Management Authority (2018)** – Implements the **CWDT Award** and **Supreme Court judgment**.

#### ***UPSC Prelims Facts:***

- **Origin:** Talakaveri, Brahmagiri Hills, Kodag District, Karnataka.
- **Length:** Approximately 800 km.
- **States Covered:** Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala.
- **Union Territory Covered:** Puducherry.
- **Major Tributaries:** Hemavati, Kabini, Harangi, Shimsha, Bhavani, Amaravathi, Noyyal, Arkavathi.
- **Inter-State Measuring Point:** Biligundulu.
- **Major Reservoirs:** Krishnarajasagara, Kabini, Hemavathy, Harangi, Mettur, Bhavanisagar, Amaravathy, Banasurasagar.

#### ***UPSC Mains Enrichment:***

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**"Inter-State river disputes can achieve durable resolution only when constitutional federalism is complemented by scientific river basin management, transparent institutions and cooperative water governance."**