

Why Goa May Get a Tiger Reserve: CEC Report, Government Stand & Key Recommendations

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Tiger Reserve Latest News

- The Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has advised the Goa government to create a tiger reserve in the State.
- It suggested doing this in a **phased manner**, indicating a gradual approach to setting up the reserve.

Why the CEC Recommended a Tiger Reserve in Goa

- The CEC's recommendation is rooted in earlier judicial and conservation actions.
- In July 2023, the Bombay High Court directed the Goa government to declare five protected areas as a tiger reserve within three months.
- These five protected areas were:
 - Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary,
 - Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary,

- Bhagwan Mahavir National Park,
- Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary, and
- Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The order followed a petition by the Goa Foundation after a tigress and her three cubs were allegedly poisoned in the Mhadei Sanctuary in 2020.
- The Court also asked the State to prepare a **Tiger Conservation Plan** and settle the rights of Scheduled Tribes and forest dwellers.
- Notably, the National Tiger Conservation Authority had already recommended these areas for tiger reserve status in 2016.

How the Goa Government Responded to the Tiger Reserve Order

- The Goa government challenged the High Court’s directive by filing a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court, claiming that declaring the areas as a tiger reserve would affect nearly one lakh people.
 - However, its own affidavit later revealed a much smaller number — roughly 1,274 households across 33 villages, amounting to 5,000–6,000 people.
- The State also argued that Goa had **no “resident” tigers** and that those seen in its forests were merely “transient.”
 - This stance contradicted its 2018 submission before the Mhadei Water Disputes Tribunal, where it had asserted evidence of a resident tiger population.
 - It had, then, described Goa’s forests as part of a contiguous tiger landscape linked to Karnataka’s Kali Tiger Reserve and Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Due to these conflicting claims, the Supreme Court asked the **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)** to conduct a site visit and examine the matter.

CEC Recommendation for Goa’s Tiger Reserve

- The CEC’s report acknowledged fears among local residents about displacement and stressed that the Goa government must reassure affected communities.
- It proposed creating the tiger reserve in phases, beginning with areas that are ecologically sensitive, least inhabited, and directly connected to **Karnataka’s Kali Tiger Reserve**, which has a permanent tiger presence.

Core Zone (Phase 1)

- Include protected areas contiguous with Kali’s core area
- Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary — 50 households
- Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary — 41 households
- Total core area recommended: 296.7 sq km

Buffer Zone (Phase 1)

- Include areas adjoining the buffer zone of Kali Tiger Reserve with minimal habitation

- Northern Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary — 9 households
- Bhagwan Mahavir National Park — 2 households
- The CEC said this phased approach would minimise community disturbance while strengthening **landscape connectivity and ecological functionality** across the Goa-Karnataka tiger habitat network.

Why the Tiger Reserve Designation Matters

- Declaring an area a tiger reserve brings in greater funding for conservation, research, and habitat management compared to existing wildlife sanctuaries.
- It also requires dividing the landscape into core and buffer zones.
 - **Core zones** must remain inviolate, meaning human presence is discouraged. Residents cannot be forced out, but they may be offered incentives to voluntarily relocate.
 - **Buffer zones** allow regulated human activities and do not need to be free of habitation.
- This zoning helps strengthen tiger protection while balancing community interests.

How a Tiger Reserve Is Declared in India

- To create a tiger reserve, the state government first identifies a suitable area and submits a detailed proposal to the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**.
- The NTCA evaluates the site's ecological suitability and tiger habitat potential, then forwards its recommendation to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- Following this, the state issues a preliminary notification, invites and addresses objections, and finally issues a formal notification under **Section 38V** of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, officially designating the area as a tiger reserve.

Source: **TH** | **TOI** | **NTCA**

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