



## PARLIAMENT QUESTION: OFFSHORE DEEP-SEA MINING IN KERALA

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The Central Government has launched the first tranche of auction of 13 offshore blocks on 28.11.2024 for the grant of a composite licence, i.e. exploration licence-cum-production lease. This includes three offshore blocks of construction sand off the coast of Kerala beyond the territorial waters.

As per Rule 5(2) of the Offshore Areas Operating Right Rules, 2024, prior consultation with stakeholder Ministries/Departments, including the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF & CC), the Department of Fisheries and the Ministry of Earth Sciences, is mandatory before notifying any offshore area for the grant of operating rights. In the present case, the Ministry of Mines has consulted with the MoEF & CC, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Earth Sciences and other related Ministries/Departments before notification of blocks for auction and no objection from all Ministries/Departments was received prior to notification for auction.

Further, Rule 10(5) and Rule 18(3) of the Offshore Areas Mineral (Auction) Rules, 2024, mandate that the Successful/Preferred Bidder obtain all consents, approvals, permits, and no-objections required under applicable laws before commencement of production or exploration operations, including those relating to environmental protection.

In order to conserve marine species, MoEF & CC has notified 130 Marine Protected Areas across the Coastal States and Islands and 106 coastal and marine sites have been identified and prioritised as Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas (ICMBAs) to take care of marine species conservation. The offshore blocks have been carved by excluding these areas.

Furthermore, as per the provisions of the Offshore Areas Mineral Conservation and Development Rules, 2024, no production operations shall be undertaken except in accordance with a production plan. The production plan, inter alia, includes an environmental management plan indicating baseline information, impact assessment and mitigation measures.

Additionally, Section 16A of the Offshore Areas Mineral (Development and Regulation) Act, 2002 provides for the establishment of the Offshore Areas Mineral Trust as a non-profit autonomous body. Accordingly, the Offshore Areas Mineral Trust has been established vide S.O. 3246(E) dated 09.08.2024. The coastal States have been made members of the Governing Body and Executive Committee of the Trust.

The funds accruing to the Trust shall, inter-alia, be used for research, administration, studies and related expenditure with respect to offshore areas and mitigation of any adverse impact that may be caused to the ecology in the offshore area, due to operations undertaken, providing relief upon the occurrence of any disaster in the offshore area and for the interest and benefit of persons affected by exploration or production operations undertaken.

Through these provisions, the Government has ensured that adequate safeguards are in place to protect the livelihoods of fishing communities, marine biodiversity, and coastal ecosystems, while maintaining a transparent and participatory framework for offshore mining policy.

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**NKR/AK**

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