Wetlands Rules, 2017

Why in news?

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has recently notified the Wetlands Rules, 2017.

What are the notable provisions?

- **Definition** - Wetlands are defined as an area of marsh, fen, peatland or water.
- It could be natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt.
- It includes areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.
- The rules apply to:
  - wetlands categorised as “wetlands of international importance” under the Ramsar Convention.
  - wetlands as notified by the central and state governments and UT administration.

- **Management** - The new Rules farm out wetland management to states and union territories.
- The State or UT Wetlands Authority will have to prepare a list of all wetlands
and a list of wetlands to be notified, within specified time.

- However, it is up to the states to decide which wetlands are to be notified.
- A comprehensive digital inventory of all wetlands is to be prepared within a year.
- **CWRA** - The new rules have done away with the earlier Central Wetlands Regulatory Authority (CWRA) entirely.
- CWRA has been replaced by the National Wetland Committee, which has a merely advisory role. These include -

- advising the central government on proposals received from states/UTs for “omission of the prohibited activities”.
- prescribing norms and guidelines for integrated management of wetlands based on wise-use principle.
- recommending trans-boundary wetlands for notification.
- reviewing the progress of integrated management of Ramsar Convention sites.

- **Restrictions** - As per the new rules, encroachments on wetlands have been banned.
- It also prohibits solid waste dumping, discharge of untreated waste and effluents from industries and human settlements.
- It says that conservation and management would be based on the principle of ‘wise use’, which is to be determined by the Wetlands Authority.

**What are the shortfalls?**
• **Definition** - The 2010 Rules included in the definition of wetlands all inland waters such as lakes, reservoir, tanks, backwaters, lagoon, creeks, estuaries, etc.

• It also included man-made wetland and the zone of direct influence on wetlands.

• However, the 2017 Rules are not as comprehensive as this.

• It does not include river channels, paddy fields, human-made water bodies/tanks specifically for drinking water purposes, aquaculture, salt production, recreation and irrigation purposes.

• It also do not include wetlands under forest and coastal regulation zones..

• **Management** - There were lethargic response from states and UTs, in the past, on wetlands protection.

• So devolving management to states and UTs could be ineffective

• **Restrictions** - The term ‘wise use’ is subjective and could dilute the earlier restrictions.

• There is also no timeline specified for phasing out solid waste and untreated waste from being dumped into wetlands.

• The restrictions on “any other activity likely to have an adverse impact on the ecosystem of the wetland”, are not specified clearly in the Rules.

• **Appeal** - The older provision of appealing to the National Green Tribunal does not exist in the 2017 Rules.

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**Source: The Indian Express**