

# Ken Betwa River Linking: Notes for UPSC 2020

The Ken Betwa interlinking of rivers (ILR) project was touted as the first river inter-link project under the revised national scheme. It was given the Union Cabinet's approval in July 2014, but was stalled because of protests from environmentalists and wildlife conservationists. In this article, you can read all about the project and its status as of today for the UPSC exam.

## Ken Betwa (ILR) Project Details

- It is a project proposed to transfer excess water from the River Ken to the Betwa basin through the use of a concrete canal. The aim of the project is to provide irrigation to the Bundelkhand region, which is one of the worst drought-affected areas in India.
- The beneficiary states are Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- It will meet irrigation purposes, drinking water and electricity needs of 6 districts in both the states.
- The proposed concrete canal would be 221 km long. It will pass through Jhansi, Banda and Mahoba districts of UP and Chhatarpur, Panna and Tikamgarh districts of MP.
- A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Centre, and the governments of UP and MP for the project.

## Why did environmentalists protest?

Conservation activists protested the announcement of the project citing several reasons:

1. Nearly 8,650 hectares of forest land including part of **Panna National Park** in Madhya Pradesh will be submerged if the project were to become a reality.
2. It will also have an adverse impact on tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries in the region.

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) had given the clearance to this project with a few conditions. The clearance from the NBWL was required as the project would warrant diversion of forest land from the core area of the Panna Tiger Reserve. The conditions set by the NBWL are:

1. To compensate for the loss of tiger habitat and to complete the ban of fresh mining lease in the area, the sanctuaries of Ranipur and Rani Durgavati were to be integrated with the Panna Tiger Reserve.
2. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) would handle the landscape plan for the area with the help of Wildlife Institute of India.

## **Madhya Pradesh's Objection**

Despite getting clearances from all quarters, the state government of MP had raised certain objections in 2017. The MP government had wanted to integrate three smaller projects of Phase II of the project into Phase I. The three smaller projects are: the Lower Orr dam, the Bina complex and the Kotha barrage. In 2017, the Centre had agreed to MP's demand.

As a result of the clubbing of the two phases, the cost of the project is expected to go up. Also, the irrigated area is also increased to about 9 lakh hectares, as opposed to the earlier 6.35 lakh hectares.

## **Ken Betwa project status**

The project has still not taken off. With widespread opposition from conservationists, and disagreements between governments, the project is still in the feasibility stage. However, with the results of the 2019 general elections giving the present government a huge mandate, the project was expected to receive a new lease of life. As of January 2020, the project again has run into trouble as environmentalists cried foul over the motives behind the interstate meeting that took place on January 31st, 2020. As of now the project is still to begin in earnest.