

**BUFFER ZONE**

**Prelims:** Environment

**Mains:** GS-III- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

**Why in News?**

- ▶▶ The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has relaxed the procedure for environmental clearances of developmental activities in the buffer zone.

**Highlights:**

- ▶▶ Buffer Zone is an area supposed to reinforce conservation of protected area. This move is likely to weaken the protection offered to wildlife sanctuaries and national parks.
- ▶▶ As per an office memorandum (OM), the projects outside the boundary of the notified Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) of a sanctuary or national park but within 10 km radius of the park will not need prior clearance from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).
- ▶▶ The Wildlife Conservation Strategy of 2002 recommends a buffer of 10 km around sanctuaries.
- ▶▶ ESZ are formed to serve as “shock absorber” for protected areas. The basic aim here is to regulate certain activities around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries to minimise negative impact on the fragile ecosystem around.
- ▶▶ Such proposals will now get environmental clearance from the ministry’s Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), which will ensure “appropriate conservation measures in the form of recommendations”.
- ▶▶ Projects within the notified ESZ will require the NBWL’s nod, which can be applied for together with the initial “terms of reference” application.
- ▶▶ Mining will be prohibited within the notified ESZ or within only one km from the boundary of the park, whichever is higher according to the new OM.
- ▶▶ It nullifies previous OMs dated February 27, 2007 and December 2, 2009, which made the NBWL’s approval mandatory for projects within a 10 km radius of the park.

**Concerns:**

- ▶▶ This completely defeats the purpose of recognising 10 km around protected areas as areas that need to be recognised for their conservation value.

- ▶▶ It also reads down the importance of ensuring wildlife related scrutiny at the time of environment clearances.

### **National Board for Wildlife:**

- ▶▶ As per the amendment of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in 2002, a provision was incorporated for the constitution of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), replacing the Indian Board for Wildlife.
- ▶▶ The National Board for Wildlife has 47 members with the Prime Minister in the Chair.
- ▶▶ The Minister in charge of the Ministry of Environment & Forests in the Central Government is the Vice-Chairperson.
- ▶▶ The Board is responsible for promotion of conservation and development of wildlife and forests.

