

**F. No. 11-98/2019-FC**  
Government of India  
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change  
(Forest Conservation Division)

Indira Paryavaran Bhawan,  
Aliganj, Jorbagh Road,  
New Delhi-110003  
Dated: 14<sup>th</sup> November, 2019

To  
The Principal Secretary (Forests),  
All State/UT Governments

**Sub: Defining "Dictionary meaning of Forest" as contained in the order dated 12.12.1996 of Hon'ble Supreme Court - regarding**

Sir,

I am directed to refer to the matter mentioned in the subject above and to inform that issue was deliberated by the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) in its meeting held on 26.09.2019. The FAC perused the directions contained in the Hon'ble Supreme Court's order dated 12.12.1996 with regard to the definition of forest. The action taken in compliance to order of Hon'ble Supreme Court by various State/UT Government was also noted. The FAC observed that there cannot be any uniform criteria to define forest which can be applicable to all forest types in all State/UTs. The FAC further observed that there is a matter related to this is *sub-judice* in the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

2. Based on the recommendation of the FAC with regards to the 'definition of forests', the Ministry has decided as follows:

- (i) India is a vast country with varied geo-physical units and soil-climatic conditions that has given rise to a number of forest types. There are variations even within the forest types.
- (ii) As far as developing criteria for 'deemed forests' is concerned, there cannot be any uniform criteria applicable to all forest types or all states. There has to be different criteria for different forest types or states.
- (iii) It is not only that Hon'ble Supreme Court had directed states to identify their own forests, in fact the states, having well established forest departments, are in a better position, rather than MoEF&CC, to understand their own forests and needs, and should frame criteria for their forests.
- (iv) While framing criteria, due diligence should be exercised taking into account spirit of order of Supreme court, National Forest Policy, the rationale of having adequate forests, site quality of naturally occurring forest species etc for supporting a healthy environment.
- (v) The criteria so finalised by a state, need not be subject to approval of MoEF&CC.

This issues with the approval of competent authority.

Yours faithfully,

  
(Sandeep Sharma)

Assistant Inspector General of Forests

Copy to:

1. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, All State/UT Governments
2. The Dy Director General of Forests (Central), All Regional Offices of the MoEF&CC
3. The Addl. PCCF & Nodal Officer (FCA), Office of the PCCF, All State/UIT Governments
4. Monitoring Cell, FC Division, MoEF, New Delhi
5. Guard File