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## It's official: Locals will now map state's biodiversity

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A view of the Western Ghats—File Photo

*Implementing a key section of the Biological Diversity Act 2008, state govt orders all local bodies to form committees for biodiversity management*

Over seven years after the Biological Diversity Act 2008 espoused the formation of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC), the state government has issued a Government Resolution directing all local bodies within the panchayat raj system to form them. This effectively means that Maharashtra's biodiversity will now be mapped by locals.

The GR issued on May 2 by the state Rural Development Department asks all Zilla Parishads (ZP), Panchayat Samitis (PS) and Grampanchayats (GP) to do the needful as mandated by the Act. The committees at the ZP and PS levels will comprise seven members who will be experts in agriculture, forest products, fishery, animal husbandry and related fields.

At the GP level, the committee will be established as a Village Development Committee. All these committees can have government officers from different department as invitees and the tenure of the BMC will be same as that of elected civic bodies.

The BMC is tasked with maintaining a register of biodiversity in their area of influence. The catalogue will also mention the use of natural resources, permissions for the same and monetary benefits. It will have the right to only remark or suggest in matters coming from the Maharashtra State Biodiversity Board or the national body over the use of natural resources or information related to it.

"It will surely give power to the people to decide on the use of their natural wealth, especially at a time when resources are under threat from various companies and even the government. One must understand that this can be manipulated as well, so it is necessary to involve erudite members in these committees," said Stalin D, Director-Projects with NGO Vanashakti.

Following the enactment of the biodiversity law, several committees were set up at various locations. "This GR will make it mandatory for all local bodies in the panchayat raj system to have these BMCs. It will be a concentrated effort from all side now," a senior official with the Rural Development Department said.

Several activists fighting polluting industries have welcomed the move. "This will be a good thing for the Konkan region. We need to go to people and run an awareness programme. The more people involved, more the data. All Environment Impact Analysis (EIA) reports need to take inputs from these committees," said Satyajit Chavan, who is spearheading the protest against polluting industries in Konkan area.

***It will give power to the people to decide on the use of their natural wealth***

***Stalin DNGO Vanashakti***