

Marine Spatial Planning framework, country's first, launched in Puducherry

The framework, part of a pact under the Indo-Norway Integrated Ocean Initiative, aims at balancing development alongside sustainable and equitable ocean resource management

February 14, 2023 03:49 pm | Updated 06:54 pm IST - PUDUCHERRY

THE HINDU BUREAU



Lt. Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan along with Chief Minister N. Rangasamy, releasing the 'The Shoreline Change Atlas of the UT of Puducherry' on Monday. Hans Jacob Frydenlund, Ambassador, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Puducherry Assembly Speaker R. Selvam and M. Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, are also seen | Photo Credit: KUMAR SS.

Puducherry has launched the country's first Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) framework as part of a pact under the Indo-Norway Integrated Ocean Initiative, to balance growth alongside sustainable management of ocean resources and coastal environment preservation.

Puducherry and Lakshadweep were chosen as coastlines to pilot the MSP initiative that grew out of a 2019 memorandum of understanding that envisaged India and Norway collaborating on implementing MSP in the oceanic space.

The beta version of the MSP for the Union Territory was put together in a collaborative exercise involving the Norwegian Environment Agency, the Ministry of Earth Sciences, the

National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR), the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, the Puducherry Coastal Zone Management Authority and Department of Science, Technology and Environment, Puducherry.

At the formal launch of the MSP in the presence of a high-profile Norwegian delegation on Monday, Lt. Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, complimented the diligence that had gone into the MSP document, which was the first for coastal states in the country and, she said, a further vindication of the Centre's focus on the UT. Noting that the Ministry of Earth Sciences and other institutions were quick to respond with technical assistance when she flagged the sea erosion along the coastline in Kalapet, Ms. Soundararajan said there was no scientific mapping that showed that roughly 50 per cent of Puducherry's 42 km coastline was vulnerable to moderate to severe sea erosion.

Ms. Soundararajan said that she hoped for continued Norwegian support for the MSP-guided development of a "blue economy" in Puducherry, which had marine resources and a significant fishers community.

Chief Minister N. Rangasamy, who released 'The Shoreline Change Atlas of the UT of Puducherry', said the choice of the UT to pilot the project was another sign of the Centre's keenness on developing Puducherry. He stressed the importance of pursuing development with the least environmental consequences.

Hans Jacob Frydenlund, Ambassador, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Delhi, said sustainable management of ocean resources was the key to the emergence of Norway from a society of fishermen and seafaring traders to a blue economy where 80 per cent of exports came from ocean resources.

Pointing out that the task of objectively balancing development and environmental sustainability was by no means easy, Mr. Frydenlund said. The process had evolved through testing, failing and political wrangling especially when there were conflicts between income and profit, and opposing interests of different stakeholders, he added.

Speaker R. Selvam and K. Lakshminarayanan, Tourism and PWD Minister, also spoke at the event.

Tool for governance

Chief Secretary Rajeev Verma said the MSP would serve as a vital governance tool in ensuring the emergence of a blue economy characterised by a sustainable and equitable ocean resource management, instead of an environmentally unsustainable "brown economy."

"The blue economy concept is a lens by which to view and develop policy agendas that simultaneously enhance ocean health and economic growth in a manner consistent with principles of social equity and inclusion", he said. According to the Chief Secretary, the MSP is an enabler of the blue economy as it helped identify sites for new and emerging uses following an ecosystem-based approach, and it also mitigates inter-sectoral conflicts, and creates multi-use spaces for coexistence and synergies.

For instance, in Puducherry tourism and fisheries are two prime drivers of the economy. But in many instances the demands for tourism growth tend to conflict with the livelihood

concerns of fisher communities in terms of the use of coastal land and marine waters. In such situations, the MSP could be a vital tool in balancing conflicting interests. In fact, down the line, clearance and sanction funds for projects could even be on the basis of their MSP-compliance, he said.

M. Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said the MSP was not the end but rather the initiation of the process towards implementing the plan by balancing stakeholder interest and sustainable ocean conservation.

M.V. Ramana Murthy, Director, NCCR, M. Muthamma, Secretary, Science, Technology and Environment and P. Priyadarshini, Director, also participated.