

Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Technical Committee of State Wetland Authority Kerala (SWAK) held on 11/07/2025 in Hybrid Mode

The meeting started at 3.30 pm with Sri. Seeram Sambasiva Rao IAS, Special Secretary, Environment Department, in the Chair. Sri. Suneel Pamidi IFS, Member Secretary, State Wetland Authority Kerala, was also present in the meeting.

The Following members of the Technical Committee were present:

1. Dr. Dinesan Cheruvat IAS, (Physical)
2. Dr. Dinesan V. P., Former Chief Scientist & Head, Geomatics Division, CWRDM (Physical)
3. Dr. Harikumar P. S., Former Chief Scientist & Head, Ecology & Environment Research Group, CWRDM (Online)
4. Dr. Manoj P. Samuel, Executive Director, CWRDM (Online)
5. Dr. John C. Mathew, Environment Programme Manager (EPM), DoECC (Physical)

The chairman welcomed the Committee members, and a brief introduction to the meeting was provided by the Member Secretary, SWAK. The Environment Programme Manager, DoECC, Convener of the Committee, presented the agenda items in detail. After a detailed discussion, the Committee took the following decisions:

Agenda No.1

Brief Documents and wetland boundary of the 20 wetlands prepared for notification as per Wetlands (Conservation & Management) Rules, 2017 for review, approval and recommendation to the Authority Meeting [SWAK/55/2024-A1]

As per the Wetland (Conservation & Management) Rules, 2017, the State Wetland Authority Kerala (SWAK) had to identify and notify wetlands within one year from the date of publication of the Rules. The Space Application Centre (SAC) had already identified 1,762 wetlands in Kerala, documented in the Wetland Atlas of Kerala, published by MoEF&CC, Government of India. From this, the Kerala State Remote Sensing and Environment Centre (KSREC) shortlisted 456 wetlands that met the criteria under the rules. Of these, 60 wetlands were proposed for Notification and placed in the meeting of SWAK on 15/02/2018. It was decided that ground truthing would be necessary before finalising the list. Joint ground-truthing was done by SWAK and KSREC for 17 doubtful wetlands, and a draft report was submitted.

On 24/01/2019, the SWAK Technical Committee directed that the Brief Documents be redrafted in the prescribed format of MoEF&CC. KSREC revised the draft list accordingly and submitted a list of 40 wetlands for notification and a comprehensive

inventory of 10,971 wetlands (186 natural wetlands and 10,785 paddy lands), which was approved by the committee on 05/10/2019.

In June 2020, under the chairmanship of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, it was decided that consultations be held with Local Self Governments (LSGs) regarding wetland boundaries, survey details, zones of influence, and permitted activities. District Collectors held these meetings, where SWAK and KSREC presented wetland boundaries and Brief Documents. Consequently, 20 wetlands were finalised for notification in the first phase. The SWAK team conducted further field visits and community interactions, and the updated Brief Documents were approved by the Technical Committee on 16/10/2023.

The list of 20 wetlands to be notified in Phase 1	
Name of Wetland	District(s)
Akkulam-Veli Kayal	Thiruvananthapuram
Ashtamudi Kayal	Kollam
Beypore	Kozhikode
Biyyam Kayal	Malappuram
Dharmadam - Ancharakandi	Kannur
Kadalundi	Kozhikode, Malappuram
Kallayi	Kozhikode
Kattampally - Valapattanam - Kuppam	Kannur
Kavvai - Karattuvayal - Kaniyachira	Kannur, Kasargode
Kayamkulam Kayal and Pullikkal Kayal	Alappuzha, Kollam
Korapuzha and Agalapuzha	Kozhikode
Kottuli	Kozhikode
Murat and Pookkod-Kozhikode Lake	Kozhikode
Paravur Kayal	Kollam
Ponnani	Malappuram
Pookode Lake	Wayanad
Sasthamkotta Lake	Kollam
Vattakayal and Kottakkal Kayal	Kollam
Vellayani Kayal	Thiruvananthapuram
Vembanad-Kol	Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kottayam & Alappuzha

The Authority meeting to finalise the notification was scheduled for January 2024 but was postponed as the Hon'ble Chief Minister directed to collect comments from LSGs and the LSGD sought more time to provide inputs. Training sessions for LSGs were conducted in February 2024, and comments from LSGs were received by December 2024. Based on these, SWAK revised the boundaries of 6 wetlands and updated the Brief Documents of 3 wetlands by adding pre-existing rights.

The Committee discussed the revised and updated wetland boundaries and brief documents in detail, and Dr. Dinesan V. P. suggested elaborating the Hydrology part in the Brief Documents. *The Committee decided to approve the Brief Documents and draft*

wetland boundary of the 20 wetlands selected in Phase I and recommended for further approval by the Authority.

Agenda No.2

Proposal for Revision of the Ramsar Boundaries of Vembanad-Kol Wetland Complex and Ashtamudi Estuary and the Ramsar Information Sheets (RISs) of the three Ramsar Wetlands [SWAK/43/2024-A1]

The Vembanad-Kol, Ashtamudi, and Sasthamkotta wetlands were designated as Ramsar Sites in 2002 under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Since their designation, the Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) for these sites have not been formally updated. As part of the wetland notification process in Kerala, the State Wetland Authority Kerala (SWAK) has undertaken a detailed assessment of these Ramsar Sites using satellite imagery, ground-truthing, and stakeholder consultations to reassess their existing boundaries. Based on this comprehensive assessment, the boundaries of the Vembanad-Kol and Ashtamudi Ramsar Sites were revised, primarily due to more accurate geospatial data and improved technical delineation.

The area of the Vembanad-Kol wetland has been proposed to be revised from 151,250 ha to 24,656.79 ha, and the Ashtamudi Estuary's area has been revised from 6,140 ha to 5,290.86 ha. The revisions, along with the proposed updating of the Ramsar Information Sheets for Vembanad-Kol, Ashtamudi, and Sasthamkotta wetlands, are now placed before the SWAK Technical Committee for review, recommendation, and approval to initiate the official Ramsar revision process.

Dr. Dinesan V.P. suggested that since there is a significant change in the area of Vembanad-Kol, the reasons for such changes should be specified. The EPM clarified that the excluded areas consist of human settlements. Dr. Dinesan Cheruvat added that paddy fields were also excluded from the boundary. Dr. P.S. Harikumar asked for clarification on that since the revised Integrated Management Plan of Vembanad-Kol is prepared for the existing Ramsar boundary, is it required to change as per the proposed boundary? EPM responded that the IMP is for the existing boundary. But getting approval from the Ramsar Secretariat will take time. So, currently no need to change the IMP.

The Committee decided to approve the proposed Ramsar Boundaries of Vembanad-Kol and Ashtamudi wetlands and the updating of the Ramsar Information Sheets of three Ramsar Sites accordingly, and recommended for further approval by the Authority.

Agenda No.3

Integrated Management Plan of Sasthamkotta Lake, prepared in association with Wetlands International South Asia (WISA) [SWAK/A1/102/2018]

The revised Integrated Management Plan (IMP) of the Sasthamkotta Lake – Ramsar wetland, prepared in association with Wetlands International South Asia (WISA), was developed through multiple stakeholder consultations and rigorous field assessments. The Ramsar boundary of the wetland has been considered as the official wetland boundary for the preparation of the IMP. After the multilevel consultation meetings with various stakeholders, a final meeting with the major Implementing Departments, LSGs, and NGOs was carried out at the Sasthamkotta Panchayat conference Hall on 21/06/2025 and finalised the revised IMP.

The total budget of the IMP for 5 years is 16.67 Crores. The first two years of the project will be funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) under the project - Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IMWBES), and the funds are ready to be disbursed to SWAK by the MoEFCC, Govt of India. The subsequent three years will be funded under the CSS, namely, the National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA) in the ratio 60 Centre: 40 State.

The draft revised Integrated Management Plan of the Sasthamkotta Lake – Ramsar Wetland is placed before the Technical Committee. The Member Secretary informed that the fund is available with the MoEFCC. The Chairman sought clarification on Catchment Conservation activities. EPM described the activities. The significance of Sasthamkotta Lake is also emphasised.

The Committee decided to approve the revised IMP of Sasthamkotta Lake and recommended it for further approval of the Authority.

Agenda No.4

Review and Approval of Kuttanad Wetland Interpretation Centre (KWIC) - A Catalyst for Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Preservation [SWAK/21/2025-A1]

The District Collector of Alappuzha has forwarded the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the proposed project titled “Kuttanad Wetland Interpretation Centre – A Catalyst for Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Preservation,” prepared by *Kuttanadan Initiatives*, a registered startup. The project is part of the Vembanad Rejuvenation Programme led by the district administration and aims to establish a Ramsar Wetland Interpretation Centre in the Kuttanad region, which falls under Zone III of the Vembanad-Kol Wetland Complex as per the draft revised Integrated Management Plan (IMP).

The proposed centre is designed to promote sustainable wetland tourism, preserve

local cultural heritage, enhance environmental education, and foster community engagement. The project requires a land area of 1600 sq.m and has an estimated budget of ₹15 crore. The plan spans five years: the first two years focus on establishment and operationalisation, the third year on marketing and tourism development, the fourth year on expansion and international collaboration, and the fifth year on global branding.

The Interpretation Centre is envisioned as a self-sustaining model, projected to generate ₹4.2 crore annually through ticket sales, tours, workshops, and local product sales, with a surplus of ₹1 crore in the first year alone, to be reinvested in future expansion and activities. It is also proposed that the Vembanad-Kol Wetland Management Unit (VKWMU), as outlined in the revised IMP, will be housed within this Centre.

The proposed site, located near the Punnamada Nehru Trophy finishing point, lies outside the 50-meter buffer zone of the Vembanad-Kol wetland and falls within the premises of the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) office complex. The Centre is expected to contribute significantly to local economic development, livelihood generation, ecosystem service enhancement, and international visibility of Kuttanad's ecological and cultural values.

Given its strategic importance for wetland conservation, sustainable tourism, and integrated management, the project is proposed to be submitted for sole funding by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India. Prior to this, it requires review, approval, and recommendation by the Technical Committee of SWAK, followed by presentation before the SWAK Authority meeting. The DPR has been submitted before the Technical Committee for consideration.

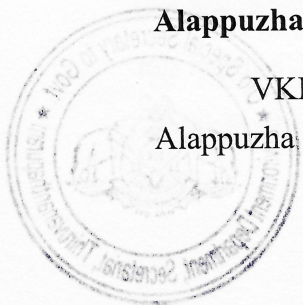
Dr. P.S. Harikumar suggested that the title of the project, "Kuttanad Wetland Interpretation Centre," should be revised, as the project pertains to the Vembanad Wetland. He recommended using "Vembanad" in the title instead. Dr. Manoj P. Samuel proposed the alternative name "A Coastal Wetland Interpretation Centre." However, the EPM mentioned that it would be more appropriate to align the name with the Ramsar designation.

The Committee decided to approve the proposal with a change in the project title to "Vembanad Interpretation Centre, Kuttanad" and recommended it for further approval of the Authority.

Agenda No.5

Request for Wetland Clearance - VKL Resorts India Pvt. Ltd, Mullackal Village, Alappuzha District [SWAK/179/2024-A2]

VKL Resorts India Pvt. Ltd. had initially obtained a building permit from Alappuzha Municipality in 2010 for a resort project in Mullackal Village, Alappuzha.



Construction began the same year, and about 70% of the project was completed by 2017. Following the expiration of the permit, and with the enforcement of the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, the proponent submitted a revised plan in 2018 and obtained Environmental Clearance (EC) from the MoEF&CC in 2019 for project expansion. Based on this EC, the Municipality renewed the building permit in 2020. However, the project faced legal challenges, including a complaint leading to an interim order by the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala in 2023, which prompted the District Collector to seek clarification from the State Wetland Authority Kerala (SWAK) regarding the applicability of Wetland Rules.

Upon review of geo-coordinates, SWAK confirmed via letter dated 11.02.2025 that the site falls within the Ramsar boundary of the Vembanad-Kol Wetland, making the Wetland Rules applicable. The proponent appealed, arguing that construction began before the Wetland Rules came into force and that the EC recognized the project as an expansion. The High Court, in its judgment dated 02.05.2025, directed Alappuzha Municipality to issue a Partial Occupancy Certificate based on SWAK's clarification.

Under the Wetlands Rules, 2017, construction of a permanent nature is prohibited within 50 meters of the mean high flood level in Ramsar wetlands, except for boat jetties. While the original permit was issued prior to the rules, the expansion occurred after the rules came into force. Moreover, the entire project area lies within the existing Ramsar wetland boundary, although outside the wetland boundary proposed for notification under the Wetland Rules.

The appeal submitted by Mr. Shaji K. Mathew was placed before the Technical Committee. *After a detailed discussion, the Committee decided to recommend to the Authority for issuing NOC to the proponent, as the building permit had issued for part of the project area on 09-03-2010 (comprising 14,158.26 sq.m out of the total construction area of 24,864 sq.m) i.e., before commencement of the Wetlands (Conservation & Management) Rules, 2010 which was issued on 04-12-2010 [G.S.R. 951(E)] and the as the project area lies beyond the 50-meter buffer of the proposed wetland boundary of Vembanad-Kol, selected for notification.*

The meeting concluded at 4.40 pm with a vote of thanks to the chair.

