Maharashtra accepts report suggesting autonomy to water resources authority

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The State government has accepted a report on an integrated state water plan (ISWP) for Godavari basin, which proposes extending autonomy to the Maharashtra Water Resources Regulatory Authority (MWRRA), on the lines of the Comptroller and Auditor General, for a better supervision of irrigation projects without interference from political bosses. The irrigation department has been under scrutiny over allegations of a multi-thousand crore scam for the last many years.

In another move, the report recommends scrapping of irrigation development corporations (IDCs) such as Krishnva Valley Development Corporation, Vidarbha Irrigation Development Corporation, Konkan Irrigation Development Corporation, Tapi Irrigation Development Corporation, and Godavari Marathwada Irrigation Development Corporation. The report suggests conversion of the IDCs into river basin agencies, which emphasise integrated river basin, sub-basin-wise development and management, and deal with surface and groundwater, and use of water for irrigation and non-irrigation purposes, unlike the IDCs, which carry a project-wise approach.

The move, if executed, could trigger a political controversy as the IDCs are accused of running under political orders.

The report said, ‘The MWRRA (in its present form) is not functioning like an independent quasi-judicial authority, despite having the powers. Its 100% dependence on the water resources department has put many indirect restrictions on the MWRRA.’ As a result, in the last 11 years, it has not been able to create a state water entitlement data base and an irrigation status report, and ensure preservation of water quality and restrictions on digging wells.

Pradeep Purandare, former expert member, ISWP committee, said, “Extending autonomy would enable the MWRRA of effective control and supervising of irrigation projects. It would have its own administrative system and would be independent from the WRD.”

The report was accepted in November 2017. This is the first of the five reports, with others being the ISWPs for Tapi sub-basin, Krishna sub-basin, for Narmada basin, and water plans for west flowing rivers.

Following the submission of all five reports, an report on ISWP for Maharashtra will be prepared, listing out all suggestions. The state water council, headed by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, and consisting of heads of 16 departments, will take a call on the implementation of the recommendations.