

Government of India  
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change  
(Forest Conservation Division)

Indira Paryavaran Bhawan,  
Aliganj, Jorbagh Road,  
New Delhi-110003

**Dated: 12th September, 2023**

To

The Principal Secretary (Forests),  
All State Governments/ Union territory Administrations

**Sub: Extended Reach Drilling (ERD) Technology and the applicability of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 - reg.**

Sir,

I am directed to refer to this Ministry's letter of even number dated 21.04.2022 on the above subject conveying in-principle approval of the Ministry to accept the report of the Directorate General of Hydrocarbon on the Extended Reach Drilling (ERD) technology and Wildlife Institute of India's letter no. WII/DWII/Misc/2022-01 dated 10.06.2023 forwarding a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) containing the precautionary measures to be followed while carrying out drilling beneath the forest area using the ERD technology. In this connection, it is to inform that report of the Directorate General of Hydrocarbon along with the general SOP suggested by the WII was considered by the Advisory Committee in its meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2023. A copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee may be accessed at <https://parivesh.nic.in>.

Based in the recommendation of the Advisory Committee and acceptance of the same by the competent authority of the MoEF&CC, New Delhi, the Central Government, hereby, accept the report submitted by the Directorate General of Hydrocarbon recommending to exempt the Extended Reach Drilling Technology from the purview of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 to undertake drilling in the forest areas, located outside the Protected Areas and Eco-sensitive Zones, subject to fulfillment of the following conditions:

- i. The station for ERD will be setup outside the forest area at a minimum distance of 500 meters and which should be at least 1 Km from the Protected Areas /corridors/wildlife sensitive areas.
- ii. The State Government shall ensure that the recommendations made in the General Standard Operating Procedures, annexed as **Annexure-I**, submitted by the Wildlife Institute of India will be complied with strictly by the User Agency.
- iii. The DGH will facilitate the formulation of detailed regional-specific guidelines by the Wildlife Institute of India. The necessary financial support, as will be required by the WII, will be arranged by the DGH.
- iv. The Region-Specific guidelines, as may be prescribed by the WII, will be complied with by the User Agency and DGH. An undertaking in this regard, wherever applicable, will be obtained by the State Government while allowing drilling through ERD technology.

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- v. The exemption considered for the ERD technology will not be applicable if the drilling area falls inside the Protected Areas notified under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and Eco-Sensitive zone of Protected Areas.

This issues with the approval of the competent authority.

**Encl: As above.**

Yours faithfully,

**(Charan Jeet Singh)**  
Scientist 'D'

Copy to:

1. The Secretary, M/o Petroleum and Natural Gas, Govt. of India, New Delhi
2. The PCCF (HoFF), All States Govts./UTs Administrations
3. The Director General, Directorate General of Hydrocarbon, Noida, UP
4. The Dy Director General of Forests (Central), All Regional Offices of the MoEF&CC
5. The Nodal Officer (FCA), O/o the PCCF, All States Govts. / UTs Administrations
6. Monitoring Cell, Forest Conservation Division, MoEF&CC, New Delhi
7. Guard File.

**Annexure-I****General Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Extended Reach Drilling (ERD) Projects in India**

Based on the site visit by the WII team, there is a need to understand the impact of ERD on the above-ground biodiversity of forest areas and associated wildlife species. Once a detailed study on animal distribution, activity, behaviour, and response to anthropogenic disturbance is carried out, we shall be able to submit detailed and site-specific recommendations to mitigate the adverse effect of drilling and exploration on wildlife species. Drillings sites in different biogeographic zones and habitat types will be selected to monitor the impact of anthropogenic disturbance on wildlife activity and their responses. The study outcomes will incorporate the relevant environmental protection measures and provide essential mitigation measures to reduce the adverse impacts of drilling on wildlife and surrounding forest areas. Since most of the disturbance is during the drilling process, mitigation measures must be implemented along with the ERD activities. The measures across different drilling sites in India will be based on a comprehensive study proposed by WII based on credible primary data concerning wildlife species in our country. Given the above, following are the general recommendations to be considered while considering ERD near wildlife-sensitive areas to be considered as general SOP until site region-specific mitigation plans are proposed.

1. The drilling sites should be located at the base of the catchment areas or downstream to avoid spill-over directly into the water.
2. The drilling should be avoided in corridor areas, especially in areas known to have landscape-dependent species such as Elephants, Tigers, etc.
3. The distance of the drilling site from the PA/corridors/Wildlife sensitive areas should not be less than 1 km. This distance is only based on the precautionary principle. The exact distance should be recommended based on the detailed study.
4. The drilling site should be installed with an active noise-proof solution to avoid impacting local habitats and wildlife.
5. There should be a comprehensive plan to mitigate the effects of light pollution around the drilling site.
6. The approach roads built towards the drilling site should be mitigated if passing through sensitive wildlife areas/protected areas or corridors.
7. The operations should only be limited to drilling at the drilling site, whereas all other subsidiary infrastructure should be far away from critical wildlife habitats.
8. As the drilling activity can't be stopped in between because of technical reasons, the drilling activity may continue across the sites. For sites, close to important Wildlife habitats the ancillary activities should be minimized during peak wildlife activity, such as early morning and late evening hours. All vehicular movement to and from the drilling site during the peak wildlife activity should be minimized and a comprehensive mitigation plan for sound, light, and other ancillary pollution should be in place.
9. A boundary wall should enclose all the drilling points/wells. They should have a 10 m wide road running across the periphery to form a barrier against fire and allow easy movement of fire tenders during fire incidence.

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10. The contingency plan /team/ protocol should be active for the drilling zone/sites to meet any contingencies during emergencies without time loss. Wildlife should be an integral part of this plan.

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