

## State plans to convert over 5L sqm land, most of it agri fields, orchards

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Panaji: In a move that significantly targets conversion of agricultural, orchard, forest-type and ecologically sensitive land for settlement purpose, the state government has notified a total of 112 such proposals and placed them in the public domain for suggestions and objections within 60 days. The proposals for large-scale conversion of land — the biggest of which pertains to a 52,000sqm tract with partly orchard and no-development slope — has evoked harsh criticism in social media.

“These conversions under Section 16(b) of the TCP Act, 1974, are against planning principles, as the Regional Plan 2021 was prepared by a task force comprising experts and government officials.

But here individual requests, which are against the interest of public, local communities and environment, are being entertained,” environmentalist Abhijit Prabhudesai said.

The notification issued by town and country planning (TCP) department includes nearly 4 lakh sqm of orchard land, about 49,000 sqm of land classified as natural cover, 26,000 sqm of paddy field and cultivable land, and 81,000 sqm of partly orchard and partly field land.

The proposals also pertain to land use change in no-development zones — steep slopes, which are watershed areas, often with fields below. In some cases, cultivable area with irrigation facilities created by the government as command area development have also sought to be converted.

Village committees are apprehensive about loss of green cover and destruction of biodiversity.

“TCP has to consider biodiversity management committees, as these have statutory rights. The BMCs have undertaken ground-truthing surveys to identify biodiversity hotspots,” chairman of St Cruz BMC Arturo D’Souza said.

The hill slopes and green areas sought to be converted harbours rich plant life and other flora and fauna. “The plants may look ordinary, but these are medicinal plants sourced by traditional practitioners,” D’Douza said.

Others objected to the use of the term “natural cover” for green areas. “In reality this is forest land, which is not covered under plantations and orchards, and if properly identified could be private forest land,” an environmentalist said.

TCP minister Chandrakant Kavlekar said that the approvals are subject to studies to be carried out. “These are not final and we are yet get reports (related to conversion requests),” he said.

Regarding criticism about conversion of agricultural land and threat to biodiversity, he said the BMCs views will be considered.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/state-plans-to-convert-over-5l-sqm-land-most-of-it-agri-fields-orchards/articleshowprint/76804283.cms>