

Regarding need to revise Indian Easement Act, 1882 and formulate a legislation for equitable and sustainable use of groundwater in the country-Laid

SHRI BHARTRUHARI MAHTAB (CUTTACK): Groundwater forms the backbone of India's water supply, providing nearly 90% of rural drinking water and 50% of urban needs. However, despite its critical role and community dependence, groundwater is legally treated as private property. This outdated legal view promotes over-extraction and inequity in access. The 2024 CGWB report reveals a rising crisis: national groundwater extraction has increased to 60.47%, with alarming figures in states like Punjab (156.87%), Haryana (135.96%), and Rajasthan (149.86%). This exploitation, largely unmanaged, threatens long-term water security. To address this, I urge the Government to reconceptualise groundwater as a shared community resource. Participatory Groundwater Management (PGWM), as piloted under the Atal Bhujal Yojana, must be expanded nationwide. Current legal frameworks, particularly the Indian Easement Act, 1882, need urgent revision. The Model Groundwater (Sustainable Management) Bill, 2017, and the Draft National Water Framework Bill, 2016, must be adopted to enable equitable and sustainable use. Groundwater governance must shift from top-down, technocratic control to inclusive, community-led action, empowering panchayats. Recharge programmes and managed aquifer initiatives must be scaled up, while demand-side measures like metered electricity use should be prioritized. A central legislative framework is now essential to ensure sustainable groundwater for all.