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Title : Need to evolve a sustainable action plan to conserve the Vembanad Wet Land system in Kerala.

DR. K.S. MANOJ (ALLEPPEY): The Vembanad Lake along with the adjacent wetland over the eastern and southern sides forms Kuttanadu, the rice bowl of Kerala, and the largest wetland system in the west coast of India. Five rivers originating from the Western Ghats drain into this Lake. A good portion of the wetland has been converted into paddy fields which remain water logged for six months a year. Some areas are left fallow throughout the year. Every year, tonnes of insecticides, weedicides, fungicides and chemical fertilisers reach into this wetland.

Vembanad Kayal are the most productive eco-system in our nation, the abode of unique species of plants and animals. It is also the cradle of several endemic and rare species of fishes, the nursery of commercially important shrimps, prawns and crabs and the natural habitat of mussels, oysters and clams. These wetlands are very important from the point of view of their flora and fauna as well as their water chemistry[R76].

Deterioration in water quality and consequent damage to aquatic organisms are found to be very serious as per the studies conducted by various scientific institutions. The pollution level is found alarmingly high.

Shrinking of Vembanad Kayal to 37 per cent as a result of land reclamation has been the most important environmental consequences of various human interventions.

In view of the above, it is of utmost necessity to evolve a sustainable action plan to conserve the Vembanad Wet Land System, one of the major wetland systems designated as Ramsar site in India. The action plan should include elements like long-term management and wise use of such ecologically important eco-system considering its international status, with focus on abatement of pollution, check on soil erosion, regeneration and development of catchment areas and frontline development.