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The Cauvery Order: Adjudication in a Drought Year

29 July 2026

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The Cauvery Order: Adjudication in a Drought Year

29 July 2026 · 4 min read ·

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The Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) directed Karnataka to ensure a flow of 3,500 cusecs at the Biligundlu inter-state gauge for 15 days from July 29, 2026, after Tamil Nadu claimed a shortfall against its entitled share amid a drought-affected basin.

THE ORDER AND ITS NUMBERS

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Directed release	3,500 cusecs at Biligundlu gauge
Duration	15 days , from 29 July 2026
Karnataka reservoir inflow shortfall	65.86 per cent below the 30-year average, for 1 June to 27 July 2026
Tamil Nadu's claimed backlog	9.46 tmc ft , as of 26 July 2026

Biligundlu is the gauge station at the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border where Cauvery flow is measured to assess whether Karnataka has released its due share downstream; it functions as the practical enforcement point for the entire adjudication framework, since compliance is judged by what actually crosses this specific point, not by aggregate release volumes upstream.

THE INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE

BODY	ROLE
Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)	Original adjudicating tribunal; final award 2007
Supreme Court of India	Modified the CWDT award in its 2018 final verdict
Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)	Apex implementation body, constituted per the 2018 verdict, oversees water-sharing compliance
Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC)	Technical sub-body under the CWMA framework, issues operational release orders like this one

The Cauvery dispute is one of India’s oldest and most litigated inter-state river disputes, with its roots in colonial-era agreements between the princely state of Mysore and the Madras Presidency. The modern adjudication structure follows the constitutional and **statutory** route for inter-state river disputes generally.

PROVISION	CONTENT
Article 262	Empowers Parliament to provide for adjudication of inter-state river water disputes and to bar Supreme Court jurisdiction over them by law
Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956	The law enacted under Article 262, providing for tribunal-based adjudication
River Boards Act, 1956	Separate statute for river-basin development boards, distinct from dispute adjudication

Notably, while Article 262(2) allows Parliament to bar Supreme Court jurisdiction over inter-state river disputes, the Cauvery matter reached the Supreme Court on constitutional and implementation grounds rather than as a fresh adjudication of shares, which is why the Court’s 2018 verdict operates alongside, rather than in place of, the original CWDT award.

WHY A FIXED AWARD STRUGGLES IN A DROUGHT YEAR

The CWDT’s 2007 award, as modified by the Supreme Court in 2018, allocates water shares based on a **normal monsoon year** assumption, with a distress-sharing formula intended to apply proportionate cuts to both States in a genuinely deficient year. The practical difficulty, illustrated by this July 2026 order, is that “distress” is not self-evident in real time: Karnataka’s own reservoirs are significantly below average, meaning Karnataka’s capacity to release water without compromising its own drinking-water and irrigation needs is itself constrained, even as Tamil Nadu’s downstream shortfall is real and measurable.

READING	KARNATAKA'S POSITION	TAMIL NADU'S POSITION
Basin condition	Reservoir inflows 65.86 per cent below average	9.46 tmc ft shortfall against entitled share
Implication	Releasing the ordered volume strains its own water security	Non-release compounds an already deficient season for its farmers
Institutional response	CWRC order requires compliance regardless of Karnataka's own shortfall	Order is Tamil Nadu's primary enforcement mechanism against a reluctant upper riparian

This is the structural tension in nearly every inter-state river dispute: the upper riparian State controls the tap, the lower riparian State depends on what flows through it, and a tribunal award fixed in normal-year terms provides only an approximate, not a precise, answer to what a genuinely bad monsoon year should mean for both sides.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Federalism, Centre-State and inter-State relations; statutory, regulatory and quasi-judicial bodies.

GS Paper 3: Water resources, their utilisation, planning and management.

Prelims pointers:

- **Biligundlu** is the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border gauge station used to assess Cauvery release compliance.
- **CWDT** gave its final award in **2007**; the **Supreme Court modified it in 2018**.
- **CWMA** and its technical arm, the **CWRC**, implement the 2018 verdict.
- **Article 262** and the **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956** provide the constitutional and statutory basis for such tribunals.
- Article 262(2) permits Parliament to exclude Supreme Court jurisdiction over these disputes by law.

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CAUVERY ORDER, JULY 2026:

CWRC ordered 3,500 cusecs release at Biligundlu, for 15 days from 29 July 2026.

Karnataka reservoir inflows: 65.86 per cent below the 30-year average (1 June to 27 July 2026).

Tamil Nadu's claimed backlog: 9.46 tmc ft, as of 26 July 2026.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:

CWDT final award: 2007; modified by the Supreme Court's 2018 verdict.

CWMA is the apex implementation body; CWRC is its technical sub-body issuing release orders.

Article 262 and the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 provide the legal basis for tribunal adjudication.

Article 262(2) allows Parliament to bar Supreme Court jurisdiction over such disputes by law.

Sources: The Hindu, Cauvery Water Management Authority, Ministry of Jal Shakti

Source: The Cauvery Order: Adjudication in a Drought Year — [Ujiyari.com](https://ujiyari.com) | Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs

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Advance Directive (Living Will)

A legal document in which a competent adult specifies their medical...

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AERB

India's regulatory body for nuclear and radiological safety,...



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