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**Legal framework in relation to the protection of coastal and marine resources in Sri Lanka: in pursuit of environmental justice**

Samage Sarath Mathilal de Silva

*Department of Commerce, University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Nugegoda.*

This study seeks to set out broadly the legal framework on both international and national perspectives in relation to the protection of coastal and marine resources in Sri Lanka with emphasis on suitable amendments to the existing law. UN Conventions of the law of the sea have provisions to protect the resources of all seas. Sri Lanka is a party to the Law of the Sea Convention acceded to on the 10th December 1982 and exercises jurisdiction over the territorial sea, continental shelf, the exclusive economic zone and the contiguous zone in keeping with the definitions laid down in that Convention. With regard to Sri Lanka, legislation enacted since the British period in Sri Lanka confers the State significant rights in regard the protection of coastal and marine resources in Sri Lanka.

It is recommended that a complete study of existing laws, the experience in discharging functions under the statutes relating to coastal and marine resources in Sri Lanka and regulations necessary to be formulated, be undertaken by the government with the assistance of the special committee. A comprehensive policy framework is available for coastal environmental management. But the legislative framework is insufficient to achieve the policy objectives. Although the coastal zone remains with the Central Government, there are subjects assigned to the Provincial Councils that have a direct bearing on the coastal zone. Provincial Councils should make a major contribution for the proper implementation of the regulatory provisions.

There are additional areas that are necessary to be identified as offences. Unauthorized transfer of permits, obstructions of public access to beach, destabilizing the coastal environment from activities outside the coastal zone, transporting of sands and damage or injury to coastal habitats are some of these. Moreover fines and terms of imprisonment incorporated in the statutes relating to coastal and marine resources in particular the Coast Conservation Act of 1981 as amended have to be readjusted considering the monetary value as at present and the gravity of the offence. Provisions such as found in section 28 of the Coast Conservation Act where a vessel, vehicle craft, boat or machinery could be released on the basis that such was used without the knowledge of the owner should be repealed to prevent maneuvering by those claiming innocence of any knowledge that their properties were used to commit an offence under the Act.

Enforcement of the regulatory system needs more comprehensive provisions with mandatory imposition of fines and imprisonment for offenders. The efforts made by the government and non-governmental organizations through community based activities to educate the public including school children on the need for conservation and protection of coastal and marine resources in the country are praiseworthy. However, these activities need also to be duly recognized through proper regulations.

sarathmathilal@gmail.com

Tel: 0112802513