Environment Impact Assessment Notification (EIA), 2020 extended till 30th June.

Context

The Central Government, in exercise of the powers conferred under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 published the draft notification namely, Environment Impact Assessment Notification extending the EIA assessment by 2 months till 30th June due to COVID-19 pandemic.

About Environmental Impact Assessment

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project or development, taking into account inter-related socio-economic, cultural and human-health impacts, both beneficial and adverse.
- UNEP defines Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as a tool used to identify the environmental, social and economic impacts of a project prior to decision-making. It aims to predict environmental impacts at an early stage in project planning and design, find ways and means to reduce adverse impacts, shape projects to suit the local environment and present the predictions and options to decision-makers.
- Environment Impact Assessment in India is statutorily backed by the Environment Protection Act, 1986 which contains various provisions on EIA methodology and process.

The EIA Process

Screening: The project plan is screened for scale of investment, location and type of development and if the project needs statutory clearance.

Scoping: The project’s potential impacts, zone of impacts, mitigation possibilities and need for monitoring.

Collection of baseline data: Baseline data is the environmental status of study area.

Impact prediction: Positive and negative, reversible and irreversible and temporary and permanent impacts need to be predicted which presupposes a good understanding of the project by the assessment agency.

Mitigation measures and EIA report: The EIA report should include the actions and steps for preventing, minimizing or by passing the impacts or else the level of compensation for probable environmental damage or loss.

Public hearing: On completion of the EIA report, public and environmental groups living close to project site may be informed and consulted.

Decision making: Impact Assessment Authority along with the experts consult the project-in-charge along with consultant to take the final decision, keeping in mind EIA and EMP (Environment Management Plan).
Monitoring and implementation of environmental management plan: The various phases of implementation of the project are monitored.

Assessment of Alternatives, Delineation of Mitigation Measures and Environmental Impact Assessment Report: For every project, possible alternatives should be identified, and environmental attributes compared. Alternatives should cover both project location and process technologies.

Once alternatives have been reviewed, a mitigation plan should be drawn up for the selected option and is supplemented with an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) to guide the proponent towards environmental improvements.

Risk assessment: Inventory analysis and hazard probability and index also form part of EIA procedures.

Salient Features of 2006 Amendments to EIA Notification

Environment Impact Assessment Notification of 2006 has decentralized the environmental clearance projects by categorizing the developmental projects in two categories, i.e., Category A (national level appraisal) and Category B (state level appraisal).

Category A projects are appraised at national level by Impact Assessment Agency (IAA) and the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) and Category B projects are apprised at state level.

State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) and State Level Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC) are constituted to provide clearance to Category B process.

After 2006 Amendment the EIA cycle comprises of four stages:

1. Screening
2. Scoping
3. Public hearing
4. Appraisal

Category A projects require mandatory environmental clearance and thus they do not undergo the screening process.

Category B projects undergoes screening process and they are classified into two types.

- Category B1 projects (Mandatorily requires EIA).
- Category B2 projects (Do not require EIA).

Thus, Category A projects and Category B, projects undergo the complete EIA process whereas Category B2 projects are excluded from complete EIA process.

Stakeholders in the EIA Process

- Those who propose the project
- The environmental consultant who prepare EIA on behalf of project proponent
- Pollution Control Board (State or National)
- Public has the right to express their opinion
- The Impact Assessment Agency
- Regional centre of the MoEFCC