

# Bill Summary

## The Inland Vessels Bill, 2021

- The Inland Vessels Bill, 2021 was introduced in Lok Sabha on July 22, 2021. It replaces the Inland Vessels Act, 1917. The Act provides for the regulation of inland vessel navigation by states including the registration of vessels, and safe carriage of goods and passengers. The Bill seeks to introduce a uniform regulatory framework for inland vessel navigation across the country. Key features of the Bill include:
  - **Mechanically propelled inland vessels:** The Bill defines such vessels to include ships, boats, sailing vessels, container vessels, and ferries. The central government will prescribe the: (i) classification, (ii) standards of design, construction, and crew accommodation, and (iii) type and periodicity of surveys, for these vessels. Construction or modification of such vessels will require prior approval of a designated authority, as prescribed by the central government.
  - **Operation:** To operate in inland waters, all such vessels must have a certificate of survey, and a certificate of registration. Vessels with Indian ownership must be registered with the Registrar of Inland Vessels (appointed by the state government). The registration certificate will be valid across the country. The certificate of survey will be granted by state governments, in a form as prescribed by the central government. This certificate will indicate the inland water zones (areas of operation to be demarcated by states) for such vessels. The vessels must also have an insurance policy to cover liability for death, injury, or damage caused due to the usage of the vessel (including accidental pollution).
  - **Navigation safety:** Such vessels will be required to follow certain specifications for signals and equipment to ensure navigation safety, as specified by the central government. In case of a navigation hazard, the master of a vessel must immediately send a danger or distress signal to other such vessels in proximity and to the concerned state government. If a vessel master abstains from rendering assistance after answering a distress call, he will be penalised with a fine of up to Rs 10,000, unless he is unable to render such assistance on certain specified grounds.
  - **Inquiry into accidents:** All accidents aboard such vessels must be reported to the head officer of the nearest police station, as well as to a state government appointed authority. The state may require the District Magistrate to inquire into these matters and submit a report recommending actions to be taken.
- **Manning requirements:** The central government will prescribe the minimum number of people that vessels must have, for various roles. Violating these requirements will attract a penalty of up to Rs 10,000 for the first offence, and Rs 25,000 for subsequent offences. The central government will prescribe the standards for qualification, training, examination and grant of certificate of competency, which indicate the fitness of the recipients to serve in the specified roles. State governments will grant these certificates.
- **Prevention of pollution:** Vessels will discharge or dispose sewage, as per the standards specified by the central government. The central government will notify the list of pollutants which will be prohibited for discharge or disposal. State governments will grant vessels a certificate of prevention of pollution, in a form as prescribed by the central government.
- **Database on inland vessels:** The central government will maintain an electronic centralised record of data on inland vessels. These records will include information on: (i) registration of vessels, (ii) crew and manning, and (iii) certificates issued.
- **Development fund:** The Bill provides for a development fund which will be utilised for various purposes including: (i) emergency preparedness, (ii) containment of pollution, and (iii) boosting inland water navigation. Each state will constitute such a development fund. Sources of contribution to the fund include: (i) schemes of state governments, (ii) stakeholders, and (iii) collections from sale of wreck or cargo.
- **Non-mechanically propelled inland vessels:** The Bill empowers state governments to delegate certain functions related to non-mechanically propelled inland vessels to their local governments. These include collating data, and conducting advisory programmes for owners, operators, and users of such vessels. State governments will prescribe the criteria (such as size, purpose, age, and design) for the identification and categorisation of such vessels.

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