UPSC Mains practice – reference note

GS-II · 21-11-2026 · 15 marks · https://www.shanmugamiasacademy.in/upsc-mains-practice/2026-11-21-inter-state-river-water-disputes

Inter-State river water disputes in India have dragged on for decades despite Article 262 and a dedicated law. Examine the reasons for this, with reference to the Cauvery dispute, and suggest institutional reforms. (15 marks, 250 words)

1. Key facts to quote

Fact	Detail
Article 262	Parliament may by law provide for adjudication of inter-State river water disputes and bar the Supreme Court and other courts from them
Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956	Tribunals on a State's request; 2002 amendment – tribunal within one year, award within three years (extendable by two), award has the force of a Supreme Court decree
River Boards Act, 1956	Allows advisory river boards for inter-State basins – little used
Tribunals	Cauvery (1990, award 2007); Krishna-II (2004); Mahadayi (2010, award 2018); Ravi–Beas (1986)
2019 amendment Bill	Single permanent tribunal with benches, Dispute Resolution Committee, data bank; passed by the Lok Sabha in July 2019, not enacted
Mihir Shah Committee (2016)	Proposed a National Water Commission by restructuring the Central Water Commission and the Central Ground Water Board

2. Tamil Nadu angle

Tamil Nadu fact	Detail
Cauvery delta	The delta districts depend on Mettur releases for kuruvai and samba paddy; the share at Biligundlu is 177.25 tmcft a year (Supreme Court, 2018)
Mullaperiyar	Tamil Nadu–Keralam dispute over the dam's safety and level; on 7 May 2014 the Supreme Court allowed storage up to 142 feet
Mekedatu	Karnataka's proposed reservoir on the Cauvery; Tamil Nadu opposes it as affecting its share

3. Static links

- GS-II: federal structure, inter-State relations (Articles 262, 263), dispute-redressal mechanisms and institutions.

- GS-I: distribution of water resources; GS-III: irrigation, water-use efficiency.
- Prelims: Article 262 is in Part XI; the Seventh Schedule – water is Entry 17 of the State List, subject to Entry 56 of the Union List.

4. Common mistakes

- Writing that Article 262 created the tribunals – the tribunals come from the 1956 Act made under it.
- Mixing up the Cauvery figures: 192 tmcft (tribunal, 2007) and 177.25 tmcft (Supreme Court, 2018).
- Calling the 2019 Bill a law – it was not enacted.

Official sources

- Constitution of India – Article 262 (Legislative Department) – https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india/
- Ministry of Jal Shakti – Inter-State River Water Disputes – https://jalshakti-dowr.gov.in/
- Supreme Court of India – State of Karnataka v. State of Tamil Nadu (16 February 2018) – https://main.sci.gov.in/
- Cauvery Water Management Authority – https://cwma.gov.in/

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