

# Policy Statement on the Land, Identity, and Livelihoods: Contestation over Mayilathamadu–Madhavanai Grazing Lands

## Preamble

The Mayilaththamadu–Madhavanai grazing lands in the Batticaloa District constitute one of the most significant agro-pastoral landscapes in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province. For generations, these lands have sustained historically livestock-dependent communities through cattle rearing, dairy production, and associated rural economic activities.

Over recent decades, however, the region has experienced increasing pressures arising from land fragmentation, unregulated land-use practices, environmental degradation, competing development demands, and the decline of traditional grazing access. These developments have adversely affected livestock productivity, reduced milk production, weakened rural livelihoods, and contributed to social tensions and disputes concerning land use and resource allocation.

Recognizing the economic, environmental, and social importance of the Mayilaththamadu–Madhavanai grazing lands, this policy statement affirms the commitment to lawful, transparent, and sustainable land governance. The policy seeks to protect grazing resources, strengthen ecological conservation, support rural livelihoods, and promote peaceful and equitable coexistence among all affected communities and stakeholders.

## Guiding Principles

The following principles shall guide the implementation of this policy:

1. **Rule of Law and Good Governance** – All land administration and enforcement activities shall be conducted in accordance with the Constitution and laws of Sri Lanka.
2. **Environmental Sustainability** – Land-use decisions shall prioritize long-term ecological balance, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience.
3. **Equity and Inclusiveness** – All affected communities shall be treated fairly and without discrimination in matters relating to land governance and livelihood protection.
4. **Participatory Decision-Making** – Local communities and stakeholders shall be meaningfully consulted in policy implementation and dispute resolution.
5. **Transparency and Accountability** – Public institutions responsible for implementation shall maintain transparent procedures and institutional accountability.
6. **Sustainable Rural Development** – Economic development initiatives shall be aligned with environmental protection and the long-term sustainability of rural livelihoods.
7. **Conflict Sensitivity and Social Harmony** – Land governance and administrative actions shall seek to reduce tensions and promote peaceful coexistence among communities.

## Policy Vision

To ensure the sustainable protection, restoration, and management of the Mayilaththamadu–Madhavanai grazing lands through accountable governance, environmental stewardship, lawful land administration, and meaningful community participation while safeguarding the livelihoods of historically livestock-dependent communities.

## Policy Objectives

1. To legally recognize and protect designated grazing lands historically utilized for livestock-rearing purposes.
2. To prevent unauthorized land-use activities, environmentally harmful practices, and unlawful encroachments within protected grazing areas.

3. To restore degraded ecosystems, water resources, biodiversity, and ecological balance within the grazing region.
4. To strengthen the implementation and enforcement of applicable laws, regulations, and judicial directives relating to pasture land management and environmental protection.
5. To promote sustainable livestock development, rural economic resilience, and food security.
6. To encourage participatory governance, social harmony, and equitable access to lawful livelihood opportunities.
7. To establish transparent institutional mechanisms for monitoring, dispute resolution, and long-term environmental sustainability.

## Definitions

For this policy:

- **Protected Grazing Lands** refers to lands designated or recognized by the State for livestock grazing, pasture management, and associated ecological functions.
- **Historically, Livestock-Dependent Communities** refers to communities and households with long-standing reliance on livestock rearing and dairy production for economic sustenance.
- **Unauthorized Land-Use Activities** refers to activities undertaken without lawful authorization or in contradiction to legally recognized land-use classifications.
- **Ecological Restoration** refers to measures undertaken to rehabilitate degraded ecosystems, water systems, biodiversity, and natural vegetation.
- **Sustainable Grazing Management** refers to scientifically informed grazing practices that prevent environmental degradation while maintaining livestock productivity.

## Legal and Statutory Framework

This policy shall be implemented in accordance with the Constitution and applicable laws of Sri Lanka, including but not limited to:

- The Pasture Lands (Reservation and Development) Act No. 4 of 1983;
- The State Lands Ordinance (Cap. 454);
- The Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka Act No. 23 of 1979;
- The National Environmental Act No. 47 of 1980 and subsequent amendments;
- Applicable wildlife conservation, forestry, water resource, and land administration laws; and
- Relevant judicial decisions and administrative directives relating to land governance and environmental protection.

## Core Policy Directives

### 1. Protection and Designation of Grazing Lands

The Mayilaththamadu–Madhavanai grazing areas shall be formally recognized and maintained as protected grazing reserves for livestock-rearing purposes. No permits, licenses, or land allocations shall be issued for activities inconsistent with the legally designated land-use classification of protected grazing lands.

All future land-use planning within the designated grazing region shall prioritize ecological sustainability, lawful land administration, and the protection of rural livelihoods.

## **2. Boundary Surveying and Demarcation**

Relevant state institutions shall conduct comprehensive land surveys and establish clearly demarcated grazing boundaries using legally recognized cadastral and administrative procedures.

Permanent boundary markers and digital land records shall be maintained to minimize disputes, improve transparency, and prevent unlawful encroachment.

## **3. Regulation of Unauthorized Land-Use Activities**

Individuals or entities engaged in land-use activities inconsistent with protected grazing land classifications shall be subject to administrative and legal action in accordance with applicable laws.

Any enforcement action undertaken under this policy shall comply with due process, applicable judicial procedures, and principles of administrative fairness.

Relevant authorities shall coordinate to:

- Prevent unlawful land clearing and settlement activities;
- Regulate environmentally harmful agricultural expansion;
- Prevent illegal tree felling, bushfires, and water resource degradation; and
- Ensure compliance with environmental and land-use regulations.

## **4. Environmental Conservation and Ecological Restoration**

State institutions shall implement integrated ecological restoration and environmental management measures within the grazing region, including:

- Reforestation and restoration of degraded ecosystems;
- Rehabilitation and protection of natural waterways and water-retention systems;
- Conservation of biodiversity and wildlife habitats;
- Establishment of ecological buffer zones to reduce human-elephant conflict;
- Prevention of soil erosion and unsustainable land-use practices; and
- Development of climate-resilient land management strategies.

Ecological restoration initiatives shall incorporate scientific assessments, sustainable grazing thresholds, and biodiversity conservation standards developed in consultation with environmental experts and relevant stakeholders.

## **5. Sustainable Livelihood Protection and Dairy Sector Development**

The Government shall support historically livestock-dependent communities through policies and programs designed to:

- Ensure sustainable access to designated grazing lands;
- Protect traditional and indigenous livestock-rearing systems;
- Improve dairy production and veterinary support services;
- Strengthen local dairy cooperatives and rural markets;
- Promote sustainable pasture management practices; and
- Enhance rural household income and food security.

Special attention shall be given to supporting women, small-scale dairy farmers, and economically vulnerable households engaged in livestock-based livelihoods.

## **6. Community Participation and Inclusive Governance**

A Joint Grazing Land Management Committee (JGLMC) shall be established to support participatory governance, stakeholder consultation, and policy implementation.

The Committee shall include representation from:

- Local dairy cooperatives and livestock associations;
- Civil society organizations;
- Divisional and district land administration authorities;
- Environmental, forestry, and wildlife agencies;
- Agricultural and rural development institutions; and
- Other relevant community stakeholders.

The functions of the Committee shall include:

- Facilitating dialogue and dispute resolution;
- Monitoring land-use practices and policy implementation;
- Supporting environmental conservation initiatives;
- Encouraging community participation in sustainable land management; and
- Providing recommendations to relevant government authorities.

The Committee shall publish periodic public reports on implementation progress, environmental conditions, and stakeholder consultations.

## **Financing and Resource Mobilization**

The Government shall allocate adequate financial, technical, and institutional resources to implement this policy.

Resource mobilization may include:

- National budgetary allocations;
- Provincial and local government support;
- Public-sector development programs;
- Partnerships with development agencies and research institutions; and
- Environmental conservation and climate resilience funding mechanisms.

Financial assistance and technical support programs shall prioritize sustainable livestock development, ecological restoration, water conservation, and the improvement of rural livelihoods.

## **Enforcement and Institutional Accountability**

All relevant government institutions, administrative authorities, and law enforcement agencies shall take appropriate measures to implement and enforce this policy in accordance with applicable laws.

Violations involving unlawful land occupation, environmental destruction, obstruction of lawful grazing activities, or non-compliance with environmental regulations shall be subject to investigation and legal action.

Inter-agency coordination mechanisms shall be strengthened to improve transparency, accountability, and efficient implementation of land management responsibilities.

## **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Policy Review**

A periodic monitoring and evaluation framework shall be established to assess:

- Environmental restoration outcomes;
- Livestock and dairy sector performance;
- Compliance with land-use regulations;
- Socio-economic impacts on affected communities; and
- Effectiveness of institutional coordination mechanisms.

Relevant parliamentary, provincial, and administrative oversight bodies shall review this policy periodically to ensure its continued effectiveness, responsiveness, and alignment with national development and environmental priorities.

## **Implementation Framework**

### **Short-Term Priorities (0–2 Years)**

- Conduct land surveys and boundary demarcation;
- Establish the Joint Grazing Land Management Committee;
- Initiate enforcement measures against unlawful land-use activities;
- Launch environmental restoration and water conservation programs; and
- Improve veterinary and dairy support services.

### **Medium-Term Priorities (3–5 Years)**

- Expand ecological restoration initiatives;
- Strengthen sustainable grazing management systems;
- Improve dairy-sector infrastructure and market access; and
- Develop integrated climate resilience and biodiversity conservation strategies.

### **Long-Term Priorities (5+ Years)**

- Ensure sustainable and conflict-sensitive land governance;
- Maintain long-term ecological balance and biodiversity protection;
- Promote rural economic sustainability and food security; and
- Establish the grazing region as a model for sustainable agro-pastoral land management in Sri Lanka.

## **Research, Data Collection, and Knowledge Management**

Relevant institutions shall strengthen scientific research, data collection, and evidence-based policy planning relating to:

- Grazing capacity and pasture conditions;
- Biodiversity and wildlife conservation;
- Climate change impacts and adaptation strategies;
- Dairy-sector productivity and rural livelihoods; and
- Land-use trends and environmental sustainability indicators.

Digital land information systems, geographic information mapping, and periodic environmental assessments shall be utilized to support informed decision-making and transparent land governance.

## **Risk Management and Conflict Prevention**

Relevant authorities shall establish preventive mechanisms to address potential risks associated with:

- Land disputes and competing land-use claims;
- Environmental degradation and water scarcity;
- Human-elephant conflict and biodiversity loss;
- Climate-related pressures on pasture systems; and
- Social tensions arising from resource competition.

Conflict-sensitive administrative approaches, mediation mechanisms, and community dialogue initiatives shall be promoted to maintain social stability and cooperative resource management.

## **Conclusion**

The sustainable protection and management of the Mayilaththamadu–Madhavanai grazing lands are essential to preserving rural livelihoods, ecological sustainability, and social stability in Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province.

This policy statement affirms the commitment of state institutions, local communities, and stakeholders to lawful, transparent, equitable, and environmentally responsible land governance that balances ecological conservation, sustainable development, and the livelihoods of historically livestock-dependent communities.

Through collaborative governance, scientific land management, and effective legal enforcement, the Mayilaththamadu–Madhavanai grazing lands can be preserved for future generations while contributing to national food security, environmental resilience, and rural economic development.