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Distress is not uncommon to the Cauvery basin. As this year's southwest monsoon plays truant in the catchment in Kerala and Karnataka, familiar scenes are unfolding. Tamil Nadu, which has a cumulative shortfall of around 51 thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft) in its share of water as on August 28, [has been seeking 24,000 cubic feet per second \(cusecs\)](#), or about 2.07 tmc ft a day, at Billigundulu on the inter-State border, during the second half of August. After its representatives protested at the meeting of the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) on August 11 over the CWMA's perceived change in fixing the quantum of water release, it went to the Supreme Court, where the Authority is expected to present its report on September 1. Apart from the release for August, Tamil Nadu urged the Court to direct Karnataka to release the quantum of 36.76 tmc ft for September, as stipulated in the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal's final award (2007) and modified by the Court in February 2018. Cauvery delta farmers need water to save short-term standing (paddy) kuruvai crop over 5.6 lakh acres. The situation on the other side is no better. Karnataka, in its affidavit, has informed the Court that the catchments of its two key reservoirs have had deficit rainfall. The CWMA has also assessed the deficit in inflow to Karnataka's four reservoirs in the basin to be about 51%. Its stand is that Tamil Nadu has "failed to understand that 2023 is not a normal water year, but a distress water year".

The plight of both States reinforces the need for a distress-sharing formula — one that is favoured by both as a matter of principle. The Tribunal, in its final award, had advocated the concept of proportionate reduction in allocated shares, which was [reiterated by the Court in its 2018 judgment](#). But, in practice, its implementation appears to be hurdle-ridden, if the decisions of the Authority and its assisting body, the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC), are an indication. Early this month, the CWRC's recommendation of 15,000 cusecs was reduced by the Authority to 10,000 cusecs. Even though the Authority says that it accounts for the ground realities and the relevant data, it should not create the perception that its decisions are shaped otherwise. Despite uncertainty about the remainder of the monsoon and rainfall pattern of the northeast monsoon (October-December) that will cover Tamil Nadu, what should not be glossed over is Karnataka's move to comply with the CWMA's directive to release 5,000 cusecs to Tamil Nadu till September 12. The quantum is insufficient for the lower riparian State but the least the two States can do is to ensure that the Cauvery does not become cause for disharmony.

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