

Bulk and Spot Zoning Changes: Two Manoeuvres to Zone Away Goa's Green Spaces



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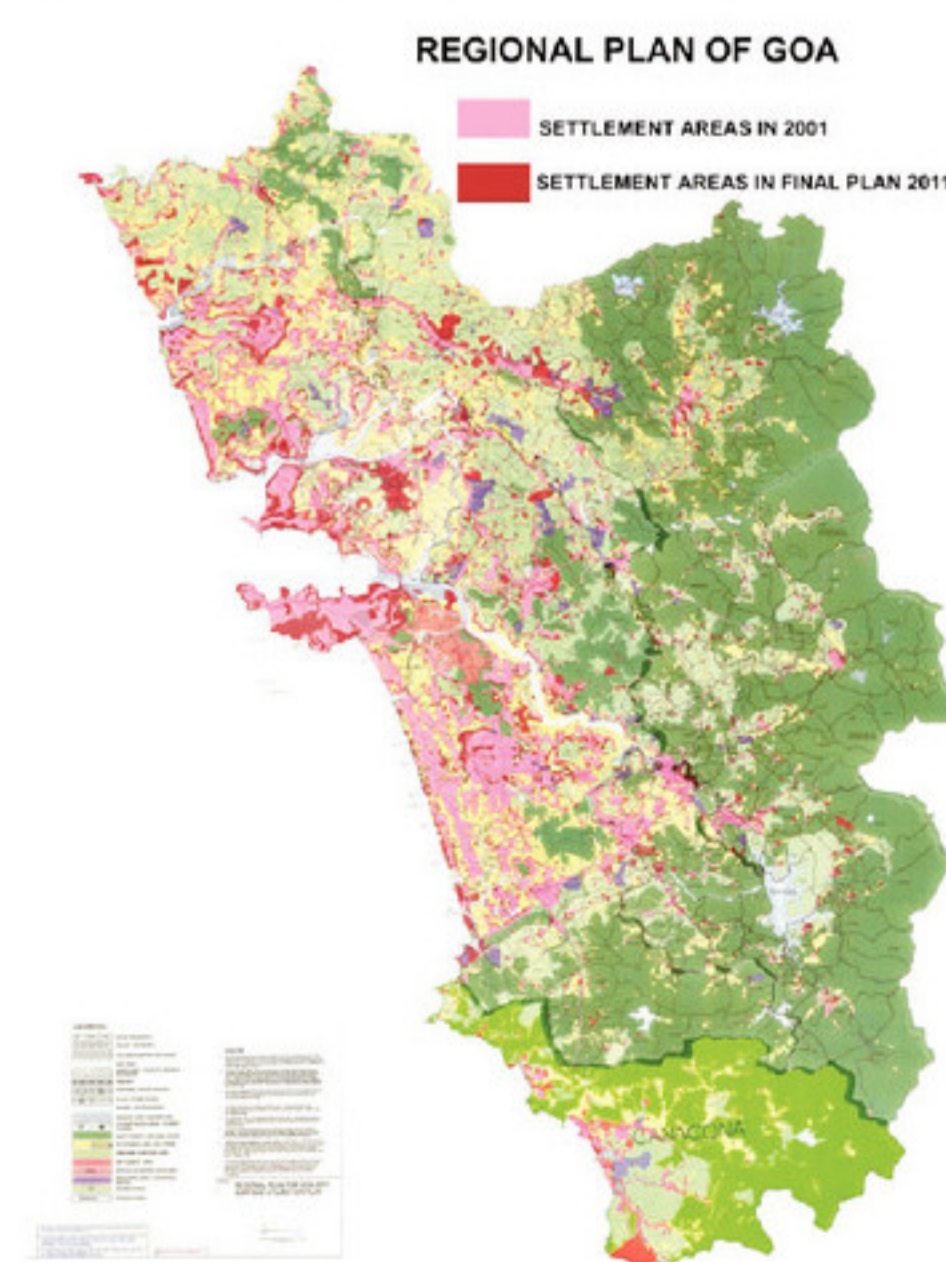
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Despite public statements by Goan politicians not to sell land to 'outsiders' and their eloquent speeches about protecting agriculture, we argue that Goan politicians have devised a range of methods to "convert" land. Conversion refers to changing land uses from agriculture or natural cover into settlement. One can classify the various strategies used to convert land into two broad groups: bulk zone changes and piecemeal (case by case) zone changes. Examples of bulk zone changes are the controversial RP-2011 and, recently, the Pernem Zoning Plan. Examples of piecemeal zoning changes are those brought about after amending the TCP Act by inserting 16B and, more recently, by incorporating section 17.2. Goan citizens have been quick to recognise bulk zone changes and successfully stop them. However, piecemeal zone changes have often fallen under the public radar and remained largely unchallenged. The scattered nature of piecemeal conversions makes them difficult to track, a fact exploited by vested interests. This article attempts to collect and present the big picture about 17.2 so discerning Goans can grasp the magnitude and implications of this amendment.

Bulk Zone Changes

The controversial RP-2011 notified in 2006 is a case of bulk zone changes. Gross zone changes were made across the entire State. These got exposed as Goans compared the Draft with the Final version of the plan. It was realised that swathes of agricultural and forest spaces were

Figure 1: Increases in Settlement in Final RP-2011



Source: Goa Bachao Abhiyan (GBA) team, 2006.

converted in a few weeks into settlements. It was done in such a brazen manner that the report did not even document the converted plots. Concerned citizens had to calculate the areas themselves. It is worth recalling how it was calculated that the TCP had converted over 7.2 crore sq.m. in RP-2011. Figure 1 and corresponding Table 1 describe the calculation. As villages realised the quantum of the ecological and agricultural areas that were sacrificed for speculative real estate, it sparked

the Goa Bachao Abhiyan movement, which forced the father of the present TCP Minister, Pratapsingh Rane, to withdraw the plan with retrospective effect. The area of 72 sq. km. is itself significant since it comes closest to the TCP minister's target of "correcting" 6 crore sq.m. of land that he claims were erroneously zoned in RP-2011 (based on a statement made by him earlier in May).

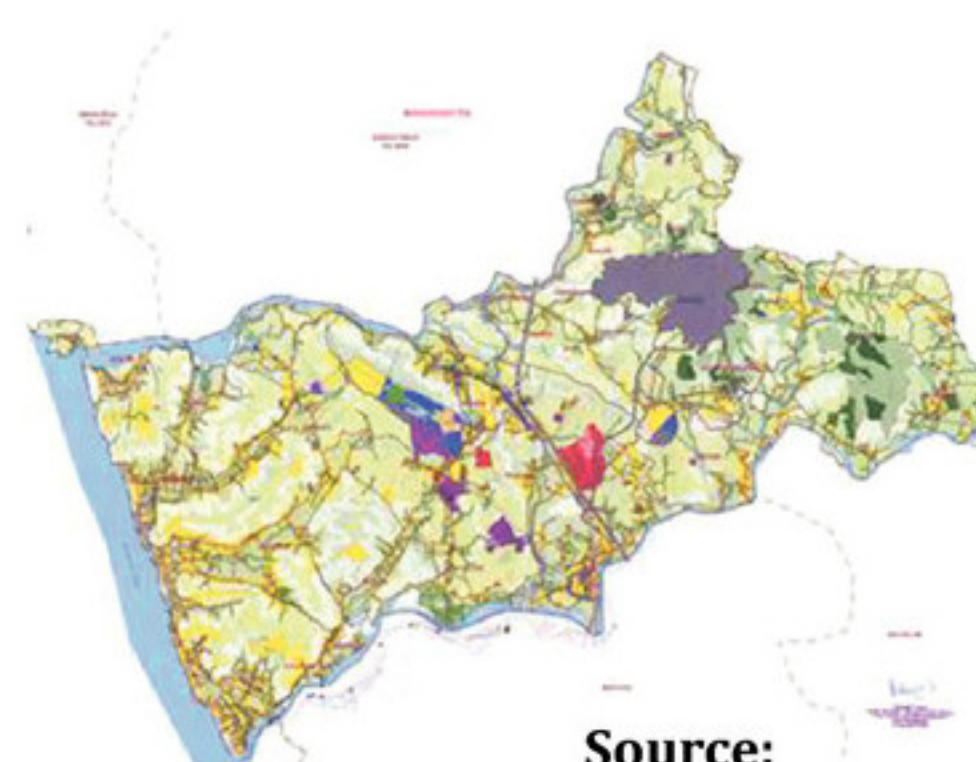
Table 1: Calculation showing how 72.55 sq. km (or 7 crore sq.m.) of land was sought to be converted by RP-2011

Talukas	(1) Settlement zone in Draft RP-2011	(2) Settlement zone in Final RP-2011*	Added settlement zones in Final RP-2011 (2-1)
Tiswadi	3,133	4,228	1,095
Bardez	5,503	6,448	945
Bicholim	1,361	2,291	930
Pernem	1,948	2,868	920
Quepem	1,685	2,435	750
Salcete	9,250	9,950	700
Canacona	1,075	1,760	685
Ponda	2,870	3,525	655
Satari	835	1,190	355
Mormugao	1,160	1,380	220
Sanguem	1,483	1,483	0
Total	30,303	37,558	7,255

*Calculated using Computer Aided Design (CAD)
Source: GBA team 2006.

More recently, we have the controversial **Pernem Zoning Plan**, which was notified on 17th August 2023. Local bodies in Pernem were neither consulted nor provided copies of the draft plan. It was only after activists threatened to move the court that the map portion of the plan was uploaded to the TCP website on 30 August. The Pernem zoning plan can be seen in Figure 2. However, to date, the report of the zoning plan has not been made public. As activists, journalists and planners scrutinised the plan, it was observed that it proposed to convert large swathes for economic development. An estimated 1.4 crore sq.m. of land was converted from green spaces into settlement. Activists alleged that the bulk of the conversions benefitted three or four large corporations. Protests broke out in Pernem, backed by the local MLAs, compelling the CM and TCP minister to withdraw the plan, perhaps after being mindful of the Parliamentary elections in June 2024.

Figure 2: Zoning Plan for Pernem Taluka 2023



Source: Goa TCP Website.

Piecemeal Zone Changes

Facing resistance to most bulk zone changes, Goan politicians have preferred to convert land by making small but regular piecemeal zone changes, which usually escape public scrutiny. It must be recalled that this is not new. It was done from 1988 to 2005, when various TCP ministers processed over 2,200 piecemeal zoning changes. Officially, the TCP has estimated that over 1.2 crore sqm. of Goa's agricultural and natural cover was zoned away. This was ended in 2005 when Goa came under Governor's rule. This method has now been revived, first by amending the TCP Act with Section 16B proposed by the then TCP Minister, Vijay Sardesai, in 2017, and now with a more authoritarian streak, by Vishwajit Rane's incorporation of Section 17.2 to the TCP Act.

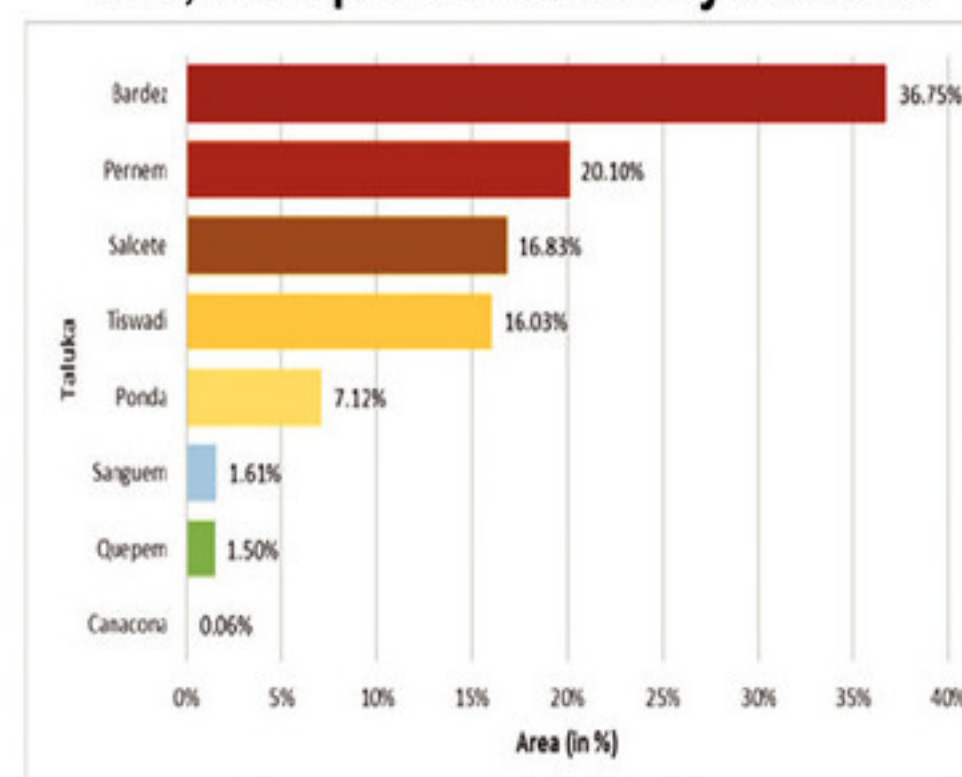
17.2, is designed not to allow public scrutiny. Upon notification of the zone change, it is immediately binding. In a short span of six months, over 3 lakh sq.m. of Goa's land has been converted. As shown in Table 2. Most of the land that is converted is agricultural (orchards and paddy fields), followed by natural cover. Even reserved forests and playgrounds have not been spared. What is the land converted to? 92% of the areas have been converted to settlement zones. Another 6% include the conversion of settlement to an industrial zone - where the party will benefit from a higher FAR, and there is the case of a property which was a No Development Zone that has been converted into an Orchard - where the party will now be able to carry out limited development.

Table 2: 17.2 Zone changes (06 Apr - 19 Oct 2023)

Zone	Area (in sq.m)	Percentage (%)
Orchard	125,792	40.55%
Natural Cover	97,794	31.52%
Paddy Fields	56,919	18.35%
Settlement	19,617	6.32%
Forest	5,000	1.61%
Industry	4,158	1.34%
Playground	535	0.17%
No zone	430	0.14%
Total area	310,245	100.00%

To understand where these changes are happening, observe Figure 2. Bardez, Pernem, Salcete and Tiswadi account for almost 90% of the zone changes. These

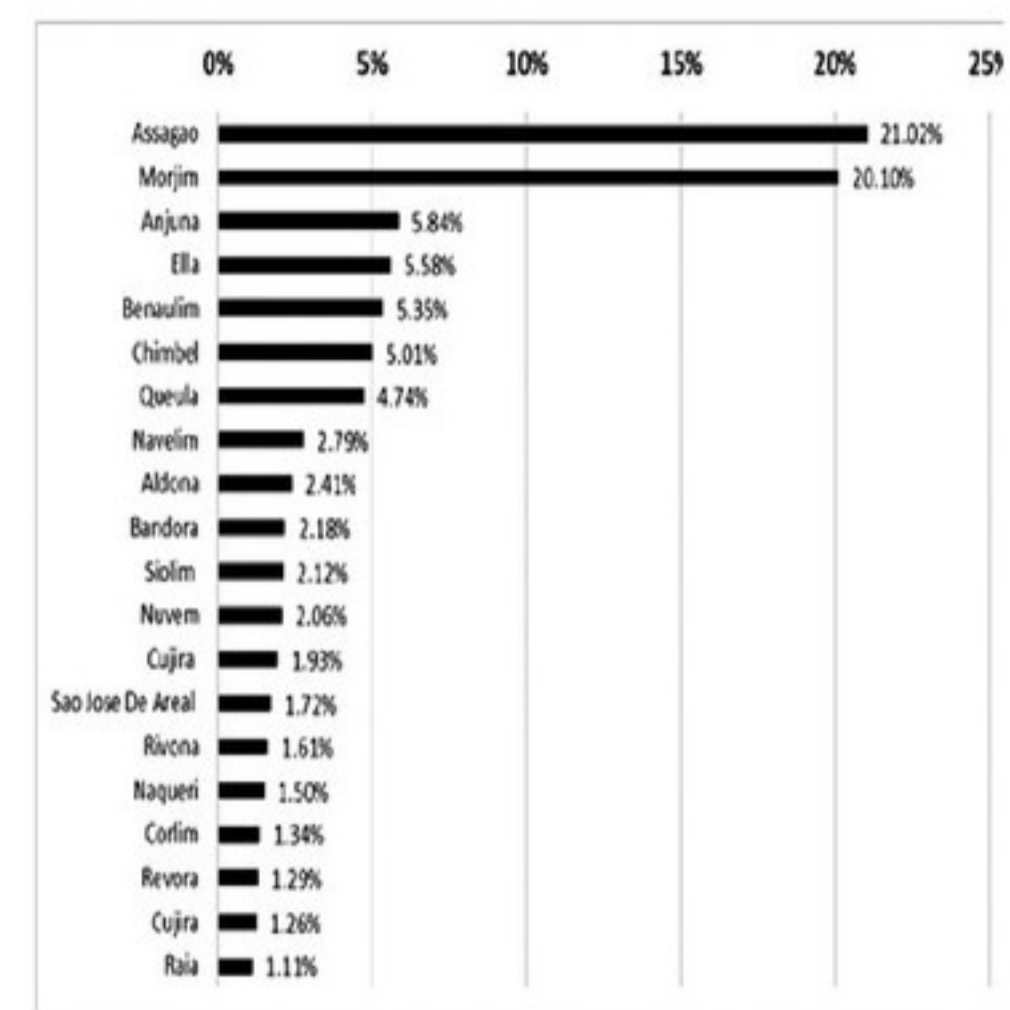
Figure 2: Taluka wise Breakup of 310,245 sq.m. converted by Sec 17.2



talukas already have the highest property values for settlement land and the lowest green cover, which will be further reduced as permissions for construction are granted.

Zooming in, using a village-wise breakup, as shown in Figure 3, reveals that more than 40% of the zone changes are from just two villages, Assagao and Morjim. Another 30% are from Anjuna, Ella, Benaullim, Chimbel, Queula, Navelim and Aldona. In other words, over 70% of the zone changes are from just nine villages - all prime real estate. Interestingly, most of these villages are associated with notable NGOs or activists, like the Goa

Figure 3: Village wise Breakup of 310,245 sq.m. converted by Sec 17.2



Foundation in Assagao / Anjuna, Pernem protestors in Morjim, and the Save Old Goa Committee in Chimbel/Ella.

Conclusion

Arguably, 17.2 is a way for politicians to convert land in places where the public would otherwise oppose it. This contradicts "public interest" community development - the foundation of planning. At a macro level, substantial land conversions are taking place. When viewed as individual notifications, this is not evident. This sleight of hand allows politicians to profit from conversions without facing electoral backlash. Amendments like 16B and 17.2 handed discretionary power to the TCP minister. It is no wonder that TCP is referred to as a 'lucrative' portfolio. Land-use planning in Goa is now reduced to a zoning game. Politicians converting parcels of coastal land for select parties, and activists objecting. Planning is stripped of any scientific rationale or commitment to public welfare. Goa needs to bring back robust, data-driven planning and land use regulations. The state also needs our assembly to regulate itself from passing future amendments that further erode remaining land use protections!

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