STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

What is CAQM? Why is it constituted? What purpose does it solve? CAQM and CPCB

Environment & Ecology

09 Oct 2026

Establishment and Legal Status

1. Full Form: Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas.
2. Established under: Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021.
3. Date of establishment: 13 April 2021.
4. Parent Ministry: Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
5. Headquarters: New Delhi.
6. Nature: Statutory body established through an Act of Parliament.
7. Primary Objective: To coordinate, monitor and improve air quality in Delhi-NCR and adjoining areas through a regional approach.
8. CAQM addresses air pollution as a regional problem that crosses state boundaries rather than treating Delhi's pollution in isolation.

Why Was CAQM Established?

Before CAQM, air pollution control involved several agencies, including the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), State Pollution Control Boards, Delhi authorities and other regional bodies.

The need for a dedicated commission arose because:

1. Air pollution travels across state boundaries.
2. Delhi's air quality is affected by pollution sources beyond Delhi itself.
3. Multiple agencies can create coordination and enforcement gaps.

4. Seasonal emergency measures alone cannot address year-round pollution.
5. Different states require coordinated policies and consistent enforcement.

Core Objective: To develop a coordinated, regional and enforceable approach to air-quality management.

Jurisdiction of CAQM

1. CAQM's jurisdiction covers:
2. The National Capital Territory of Delhi.
3. The National Capital Region (NCR).
4. Adjoining areas specified under the CAQM Act, 2021.
5. The NCR includes Delhi and designated districts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The adjoining-area provisions allow the Commission to address relevant air-pollution sources beyond the NCR where the statutory conditions are met.
6. UPSC Point: CAQM is a regional air-quality authority, not a nationwide pollution regulator.

BECOME IAS
AI-Powered UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT

Composition of CAQM

The Act provides for a multi-stakeholder commission to ensure coordination among governments, regulators, technical experts and other relevant stakeholders.

Its composition includes:

1. Chairperson.
2. Members representing the Central Government and concerned state governments.
3. Representatives of pollution-control boards and other relevant institutions.
4. Full-time technical members.
5. Non-governmental and technical expertise as provided under the Act.
6. Member-Secretary.

7. The exact membership and officeholders may change through government notifications.

Powers and Functions of CAQM

The Commission's statutory powers are primarily provided under Sections 12–15 of the CAQM Act, 2021.

Power/Function	Explanation
Issue directions	Require authorities and relevant entities to take pollution-control measures.
Regulate activities	Restrict or regulate activities likely to cause or worsen air pollution.
Set emission parameters	Establish relevant parameters for emissions and pollutants within its legal remit.
Industrial regulation	Restrict certain industries, operations or processes in specified areas, subject to statutory safeguards.
Coordinate agencies	Coordinate different governments and pollution-control authorities.
Monitor compliance	Track implementation and enforce pollution-control directions.
Research and planning	Identify pollution sources and develop evidence-based control measures.
Emergency response	Coordinate graded action when air quality deteriorates.

BECOME IAS
AI-Powered UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT

Can CAQM Issue Binding Directions?

Yes. CAQM can issue statutory directions that are binding within its legal jurisdiction. The Act provides enforcement mechanisms and penalties for contraventions, subject to its provisions.

Section 28 provides for the Act's overriding effect in matters within its statutory scope.

However, CAQM is not a court and does not replace every environmental regulator or judicial function.

CAQM and GRAP

GRAP stands for Graded Response Action Plan.

It is an emergency framework under which progressively stronger pollution-control measures are implemented as air quality deteriorates.

The commonly used GRAP stages for Delhi-NCR are:

BECOME IAS
An Endeavour for UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT

Stage I: Poor (AQI 201–300)

1. Dust-control measures.
2. Mechanised sweeping and water sprinkling where required.
3. Enforcement against open waste burning.
4. Measures to control road and construction dust.

Stage II: Very Poor (AQI 301–400)

1. Stronger dust-control measures.
2. Restrictions relating to diesel generator sets, subject to applicable exemptions.
3. Measures to manage transport-related emissions.
4. Intensified monitoring and enforcement.

Stage III: Severe (AQI 401–450)

1. More stringent restrictions on specified construction and demolition activities.
2. Additional restrictions on polluting vehicles and industries, as applicable.
3. Possible changes to school attendance arrangements when directed.
4. Enhanced public-health advisories.

Stage IV: Severe+ (AQI above 450)

1. The most stringent emergency measures under the applicable GRAP schedule.
2. Additional restrictions on transport, construction and industrial activities as notified.
3. Further measures based on the prevailing air-quality situation and official directions.
4. Important Distinction: CAQM is the statutory commission, whereas GRAP is the emergency action framework. CAQM coordinates its implementation and issues directions under the applicable arrangements.
5. The precise measures applicable at any given time depend on the latest notified GRAP schedule and official directions.

Difference Between CAQM and CPCB

BECOME IAS
AI-Powered UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT

Basis	CAQM	CPCB
Full Form	Commission for Air Quality Management	Central Pollution Control Board
Legal Basis	CAQM Act, 2021	Water Act, 1974 and Air Act, 1981
Main Focus	Regional air-quality management in Delhi-NCR and adjoining areas covered by the Act	Pollution control and monitoring across India
Approach	Regional coordination and enforceable directions	National technical, monitoring and regulatory role
Geographic Reach	Defined regional jurisdiction	Nationwide statutory remit
Pollution Focus	Primarily air-quality management	Air pollution, water pollution and other statutory pollution-control functions

Remember: CAQM does not replace CPCB throughout India. Its statutory powers apply within the specific matters and jurisdiction covered by the CAQM Act.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite its statutory powers, CAQM faces several practical challenges.

1. Multi-State Coordination: Pollution sources and enforcement responsibilities are distributed across different governments.

2. Seasonal Meteorology: Low wind speeds, temperature inversions and other weather conditions can trap pollutants near the ground.

3. Multiple Pollution Sources: Vehicles, industries, road dust, construction, waste burning and agricultural fires require different interventions.

BECOME IAS
AI-Powered UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT

4. Compliance and Enforcement: Directions must translate into sustained action by local agencies and regulated entities.

5. Economic Costs: Restrictions can affect transport workers, farmers, industries and lower-income households.

6. Emergency Measures Versus Long-Term Solutions: Temporary restrictions cannot substitute for cleaner energy, public transport, dust control and industrial modernisation.

7. Limited Regional Coordination: Effective implementation depends on cooperation among state governments, municipal bodies and other agencies.

Way Forward

-

1. Strengthen regional airshed-level planning and source-apportionment studies.
2. Improve public transport and accelerate cleaner mobility where feasible.
3. Enforce industrial emission standards and construction-dust controls.
4. Support farmers with practical alternatives to crop-residue burning.
5. Expand reliable air-quality monitoring and transparent compliance reporting.

6. Design restrictions with affordability, livelihoods and public-health outcomes in mind.
7. Strengthen coordination between CAQM, CPCB, State Pollution Control Boards and local authorities.
8. Evaluate interventions through measured improvements in pollution exposure rather than merely the number of orders issued.

BECOME IAS
AI-Powered UPSC Preparation by ZINKPOT