

Standing Committee Report Summary

The National Waterways Bill, 2015

- The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Chair: Dr. Kanwar Deep Singh) submitted its report on the National Waterways Bill, 2015 on August 12, 2015. The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on May 5, 2015 and was referred to the Committee on May 21, 2015.
- The Bill identifies 101 waterways as national waterways and specifies the extent of development to be undertaken on each waterway. It repeals the five Acts that declare the existing national waterways. These five national waterways will now be covered under the Bill.
- Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Technical feasibility:** Many of the proposed national waterways do not have sufficient water levels throughout the year as they are rain-fed rivers. The Committee recommended that this should be addressed during the time of techno-economic feasibility study.
 - The technical feasibility must be first established in consultation with the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation before starting any work on a river. The Bill should be in consonance with the Interlinking of Rivers programme.
 - **Financial sanctions:** Currently, developmental works on some existing national waterways are not satisfactory due to lack of timely financial sanctions at the initial stage. Sufficient financial allocations should be made at appropriate times for effective implementation of projects proposed in the Bill.
 - **Involvement of states:** While the subject of national waterways is on the Union List of the Constitution, water (includes irrigation and canals) is on the State List. The Committee recommended that the central government must make suitable provisions in the Bill to ensure that states can continue to regulate on water.
- **New authorities and policies:** The Bill states that the 101 waterways will be dealt with on a case-to-case basis under various environmental laws such as the Environment Protection Act, 1986, the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, the Indian Forest Act, 2006 and the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification. Getting the required clearances for waterways under these many laws will not be easy. The Committee recommended setting up a special cell with the consent of the heads of all the concerned Ministries.
- The Committee also recommended that the government should obtain the necessary clearances required under the Acts for the development of each waterway.
- A state level Water Management Council/Committee with representatives from the state governments should be created to oversee the development of national waterways and to resolve the issues at the state level. Such decentralization would help speed up the process of waterways development.
- Along with the declaration of national waterways, a silt management policy should be framed by the central government with the aim of preserving the river flow with its natural silt carrying capacity.
- **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI):** The Committee observed that currently the organizational set up and offices of the IWAI are not sufficient enough to undertake the tasks related to 101 proposed waterways. The IWAI should be strengthened with extra manpower and expertise in the field along with more regional offices for better monitoring of its works in different states.

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