

Standing Committee Report Summary

The Regional Centre for Biotechnology Bill, 2011

- The Departmentally-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment and Forests submitted its 229th Report on the Regional Centre for Biotechnology Bill, 2011. The Committee was chaired by Dr. T. Subbarami Reddy. The report was tabled in Parliament on August 30, 2012.
- The Bill establishes a Regional Centre for Biotechnology under the auspices of the UNESCO, to promote research in this area in India and the SAARC region. An agreement for the establishment of the Regional Centre was signed between the Department of Biotechnology and the UNESCO on July 14, 2006.
- The Regional Centre has been established through an Executive Order and provided funding, even though the legislation for its establishment is pending in Parliament. The Committee expressed reservations over the establishment of institutions before sanction being given by Parliament.
- The Regional Centre is proposed to be in Faridabad. The head office of the Regional Centre is to be established in the National Capital Region. The Committee recommended that administratively and functionally it would be conducive to have both the head office and regional centre located at the same campus.
- One of the functions of the Regional Centre is to collect and disseminate local knowledge. The Committee recommended that this should be approached cautiously to prevent it from being stolen or misused or patented abroad. Since the Regional Centre is funded by the government of India, the Committee recommended that the intellectual property generated should belong to India.
- The Regional Centre will be empowered to provide Masters and Doctoral degrees in biotechnology. The committee suggested the establishment of a five year integrated programme leading to a Masters degree. This would attract young talent to this field.
- The Committee has found that the 22 powers given to the Regional Centre are exhaustive and all encompassing. The Committee suggested that giving unfettered powers to the Regional Centre to do all acts necessary to attain its objectives be deleted.
- The Committee has found that the number of UNESCO representatives on the Board of Governors would be more than those from the Indian government. The Committee recommended that the Indian representation on the Board of Governors be enhanced so that the control over the Centre remains in Indian hands. The representation of women scientists on the Board of Governors should be addressed in the Bill.
- The Secretary, Department of Biotechnology is the ex-officio Chairperson of the Board of Governors. The Committee has suggested that this be reconsidered and someone with the competence and time to make the Regional Centre an institute of national importance be made Chairperson.
- The Executive Committee has an advisory function. The Committee highlighted this contradiction in the nomenclature and functioning of this body.
- The Committee observed that though a Finance Committee has been proposed to be established under the Bill, its functions have not been specified.
- The review of the functioning of the Regional Centre is to be done every four years. Given its novel mandate, the Committee has suggested that the review of the functioning of the Regional Centre should be done every two years. Also, the report of the review should not be treated as confidential and action taken on the report should be shared with the public.

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