

# NGOs oppose panel report

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## ‘A lot of disquiet over recommendations’

Environmental NGOs voiced opposition to the report of the high-level committee (HLC) on environmental laws during a hearing of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment and Forests here on Friday.

The Standing Committee earlier invited responses on the HLC after it was submitted last year and seemed determined to hear as many representations as it could on the report. Committee chairperson Ashwani Kumar said there was a lot of disquiet in the media over the report and one criticism was that it was done in a hurry.

A number of NGOs made representations before the Committee on Friday. The representatives included the former Environment Secretary Dr. Prodipto Ghosh, Sunita Narain from the Centre for Science and Environment; Belinda Wright from the Wildlife Protection Society of India; Dr. K. Ullas Karanth, Centre for Wildlife Studies; Dr. Asad Rahmani, Bombay Natural History Society; and Ritwick Dutta, Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment.

While the report of the HLC chaired by former Cabinet Secretary T.S.R. Subramanian was not tabled in Parliament, Mr. Kumar said there were a number of requests for hearing opinions on the report and there was a feeling that it would weaken environmental laws. He declined to express his own view on the report and clarified that he didn't think a review of the report was outside the scope of the Standing Committee.

He said this issue was very much in the public domain and the report had gone to the government and there were apprehensions about some of the recommendations.

The Standing Committee discussed various issues of national importance and since there was so much disquiet among environmentalists, it was only fair that MPs were apprised of the report, he said.

However, he said there was no time frame to come up with a review after hearing all the stakeholders concerned and since the environmental laws had to be considered, it could not be done in haste.

Union Minister of State for Environment Prakash Javadekar had said amendments to environmental laws would be brought about in the budget session based on the recommendations of the HLC.