

CHAPTER VI : MINISTRY OF EARTH SCIENCES

6.1 Grant of financial benefits without approval of competent authority

Ministry of Earth Sciences allowed five of its Autonomous Bodies to grant additional financial benefits to their Scientists without obtaining approval of Ministry of Finance and consequently incurred expenditure of ₹ 2.63 crore during the period 2002-18. On being pointed out by Audit, the matter was referred to the Ministry of Finance for *ex-post facto* approval, which advised the Ministry to withdraw the financial benefits.

As per Rule 209 (6) (iv) (a) and 230 (12) (i) of General Financial Rules (GFR) 2005 and 2017 respectively, all grantee Institutions or Organisations which receive more than fifty *per cent* of their recurring expenditure in the form of grants-in-aid, should ordinarily formulate terms and conditions of service of their employees which are, by and large, not higher than those applicable to similar categories of employees in Central Government. In exceptional cases, relaxation may be made in consultation with the Ministry of Finance (MoF).

The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) approved (March 2004) adoption of provisions in the rules and regulations of two of its Autonomous Bodies namely Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, Hyderabad (INCOIS) and National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai (NIOT) for grant of two additional increments and Professional Update Allowance (PUA)¹. At that time, MoES had already approved the same provision for another Autonomous Body under MoES viz. National Centre for Polar and Antarctic Research, Goa (NCPOR).

Accordingly, INCOIS, NCPOR and NIOT, with the approval of their Governing Councils, started paying (i) Two additional increments to Scientists C, D, E and F²; and (ii) PUA to all regular Scientists with effect from 2002-03 (INCOIS) and 2003-04 (NCPOR and NIOT) onwards. The Autonomous Bodies also granted Special pay of ₹ 2,000 per month to Scientists in the pay scale of ₹ 18,400 - 22,400. Subsequently, the remaining two Autonomous Bodies of MoES, namely Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune (IITM) and

¹ Professional Update Allowance is an incentive given to Scientists working in Department of Atomic Energy, Department of Space and Defence Research and Development Organisation to keep themselves abreast of the latest developments in their respective fields of specialisation.

² In the pay-scale of ₹ 10,000-15,200, ₹ 12,000-16,500, ₹ 14,300-18,300 and ₹ 16,400-20,400 (pay scales in force prior to implementation of the recommendations of the Seventh Central Pay Commission).

National Centre for Earth Science Studies, Thiruvananthapuram (NCESS)³ also started paying (2010-11 and 2014-15 onwards) the additional financial benefits to their Scientists. During the period 2002-18, the five Autonomous Bodies of MoES incurred expenditure of ₹ 2.63 crore towards payment of the financial benefits as shown in the **Table No. 1**.

Table No. 1: Grant of additional financial benefits by Autonomous Bodies of MoES

(₹ in lakh)

Name of Institute	Expenditure on grant of additional financial benefits						
	Additional Increments		PUA		Special Pay		Total
	Amount	Period	Amount	Period	Amount	Period	
INCOIS	29.52	2002-17	28.02	2002-16	4.76	2002-17	62.30
NCPOR	6.47	2003-17	20.29	2003-17	2.02	2003-12	28.78
NIOT	20.48	2003-10	50.40	2003-18*	1.88	2003-10	72.76
IITM ⁴	Not paid		79.08	2010-18	Not paid		79.08
NCESS	12.80	2014-18	1.58	2014-18	5.52	2014-18	19.90
Total	69.27		179.37		14.18		262.82

*upto June 2017

Audit observed that MoES did not obtain approval of MoF for grant of the above financial benefits as required under the extant Government rules. INCOIS, NCPOR and NIOT eventually stopped payment of the financial benefits as shown in the table.

After it was pointed out by Audit, MoES referred (December 2018) the matter to MoF for *ex-post facto* approval. In response, MoF advised (February 2019) MoES to immediately withdraw the financial benefits. MoES stated (June 2019) that the Autonomous Bodies had been instructed to recover the payment made on account of the financial benefits.

³ NCESS was taken over by MoES from Government of Kerala with effect from January 2014.

⁴ IITM did not grant additional increments and Special Allowance to its Scientists.