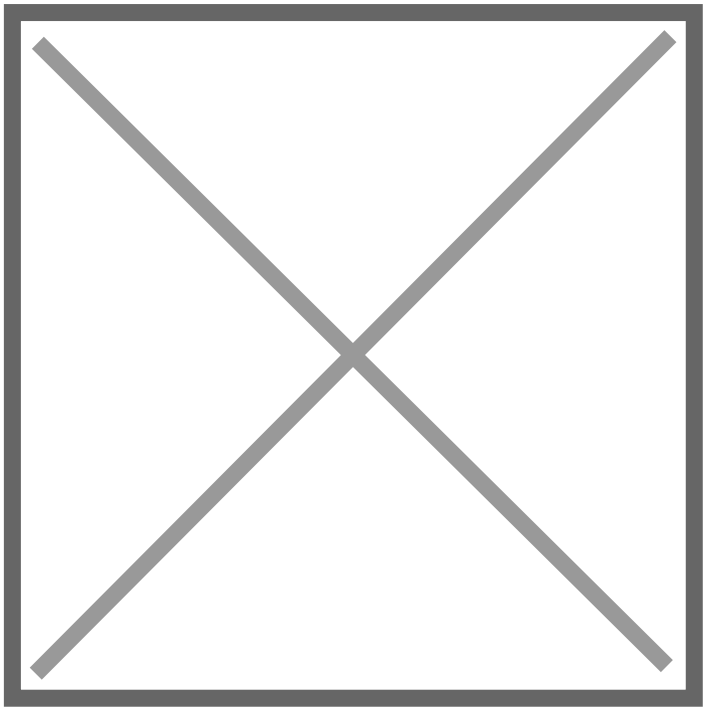
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"Western Australia is interested in supporting collaboration with India"

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- Keith Anthonisz, manager, Biotechnology, Department of Industry and Resources, Western Australian Government, who was in India to participate in BangaloreBio 2005 and promote AusBiotech 2005, spoke to BioSpectrum about the biotechnology industry in Western Australia and opportunities for Indian companies to work with the Western Australian biotechnology companies. Excerpts of the interview:

What are the biotechnology advantages of Western Australia?

The key advantages of Western Australia include innovation, skilled and highly educated work force, low cost research, and unique biodiversity. You have have a similar scenario in India too. Western Australia has highly skilled and well-educated workforce. With five world-class universities and technical education institutions producing a broad range of biotechnology graduates, there is a ready supply of essential skills for the industry. It is also home to the most successful Technology Park in Australia and many highly regarded innovative companies. The Western Australia Technology Park Ã¢â?¬â?? which is celebrating its 20th anniversary, is the one of the largest technology parks in Australia and also in South East Asia.

Academia, industry and the government are rich sources of innovation offering great opportunities in commercialization. The overall costs of undertaking research in world-class research infrastructure in Western Australia are low compared to that of Europe and the USA. At the same time, the state is a preferred location for those seeking an envious quality of life. In fact, a recent international study ranked Perth as the third best place in the world to live in. With a land mass of over 2.5 million sq.km (1 million sq.miles) and a coastline of 13,500 km, Western Australia harbours one of the world's largest and most diverse collections of unique biota that span across climatic regions ranging from sub-tropical through temperate to mediterranean, as well as one of Earth's largest reef systems.

Which are the focused areas of biotechnology in Western Australia?

In Western Australia, there are about 140 companies and organizations, which were listed in the Western Australian Biotechnology Directory, 2003. However, there are about 45 core biotechnology companies in Western Australia employing 542 staff.

The Western Australian biotechnology sector is complex due to the variety of applications ranging from commodities to very high value-added products and services. The sector has competitive strengths in science education, research teaching, dedicated research institutions and facilities, as well as a unique culture in research collaboration and a long track record in agricultural research development.

The focused biotechnology areas include biomedical, agricultural biotechnology, resource-based biotechnology, bio-leaching and hydrometallurgical processing, environmental biotechnology and bioinformatics. Nanotechnology is also an emerging area with Psivida, a company that produces Biosilicon for the slow release of drugs enjoying a 1247 percent return to share holders in 2004. Biotechnology has emerged from research carried out in the universities and research institutes in the state

and represented 10 percent of new biotechnology firms in Australia in 2003-04.

What are the incentives offered by the government of Western Australia to biotechnology companies?

The Western Australian government has a program to support biotechnology in the state. The state government has been a major investor in infrastructure development and basic research in agriculture. Biotechnology companies do get tax benefits and other incentives. Under the Biotechnology Innovation Fund and Commercial Ready Fund, the companies also get funds. Besides,companies have VC funding and IPO funding.

How you see India as a biotechnology market?

India is emerging as a major economy in the developing world. And it is the third largest economy in the third world countries. In many areas Ã¢â?¬â?? geographical, climatic zones, biotechnology advantages, India has similarities with Western Australia. With the introduction of IPR by India from January 1, 2005, it has strengthened its base among the investors. The government of Western Australia has been funding projects in India. And it is now interested in supporting collaborative projects in biotechnology with India and is looking at supporting companies and research institutes to form partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Western Australian companies like TRI-MED, Proteomics International and Inner Vision Biometrics are showing interest for a partnership with Indian pathology laboratories, hospitals or medical distributors for their products, and looking for expanding and formalizing their links to Indian research.

Narayan Kulkarni