



MEDIA RELEASE

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ONLY TWO GM TRIAL SITES TO BE APPEALED

Only one appeal relating to two sites in Western Australia has been lodged with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal against the Gene Technology Regulator's decision not to grant confidential commercial information status to field trial site locations of genetically modified crops, the Acting Gene Technology Regulator, Liz Cain, confirmed today.

On 8th August this year, the Regulator rejected all applications before her for confidential commercial information (CCI) status.

The Regulator said at the time that she did not consider any application provided any evidence or other material that would enable her to be satisfied that significant damage would be likely to occur to the health and safety of people, the environment or to property if the locations of the field trials were disclosed.

Sponsors of the 87 trial sites seeking CCI from the Regulator had 28 days to appeal the decision to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal from the date they were notified of the Regulator's decision. One additional week was allowed for notices to reach sponsors.

"I am pleased that only one organisation – the University of Western Australia relating to two of its trial sites – has decided to lodge an application for an appeal because the release of site locations is one of the hallmarks of Australia's new, transparent system for regulating gene technology," Ms Cain said.

"Five other organisations - Monsanto, La Trobe University, University of Queensland, Pacific Seeds and GlaxoSmithKline - originally sought CCI and I commend these organisations and their farmers for accepting my original decision and not further pursuing commercial in confidence exemptions.

"I know that the six organisations which lodged CCI applications with me were trying to balance the intent of the new system against the concerns of individual farmers and, it seems, with only one appeal lodged, enough time has elapsed for the organisations to sort out the issues of concern."

“This means that full details of the locations of their field trial sites can now be placed on the Office of the Gene Technology website.”

Ms Cain cautioned that disclosing the locations of field trial sites was not a licence for people opposed to GM trials to trespass or infringe on the privacy of farmers who produce the crops.

“In addition to trespass and damage penalties under criminal law, the Gene Technology Act includes fines and jail terms for people intentionally damaging property and I would appeal to the community to respect the rights of farmers who are lawfully conducting the field trials under stringent conditions set down by the Act,” Ms Cain said.

Ms Cain said she expected the public to be pleased about a range of improvements to the OGTR website which now include:

- trial sites listed in Local Government areas, and,
- coloured maps of every state and territory with field sites marked in the correct geographic areas.

“The sites marked on each map carry the PR (Intentional Release) number and the public can find full details of each site by clicking on the heading *How to Find PR (Intentional Release) Information*, on the front page of the maps section,” she said.

“The information includes the name of the licensed organisation, the crop being trialed, all the conditions set down for the trial and the location of the field trial, including map coordinates.

“I invite any member of the public who is interested in genetically modified trials to visit the website on www.ogtr.gov.au and to take the opportunity to provide us with feedback about how you think the site can be further improved,” Ms Cain said.

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