



Office of the Gene Technology Regulator

THERAPEUTIC GOODS ADMINISTRATION

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MEDIA RELEASE

FIRST APPLICATION FOR COMMERCIAL RELEASE OF GM CANOLA IN AUSTRALIA MARKS FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE OFFICE OF THE GENE TECHNOLOGY REGULATOR

The Commonwealth Gene Technology Regulator, Dr Sue Meek, announced today that she has received an application by Monsanto Ltd for a licence to grow genetically modified (GM) canola on a commercial basis.

"This is the first such application for a general or commercial release of GM canola crops in Australia and coincides with the first anniversary of the coming into force of the Commonwealth Gene Technology Act 2000, and the establishment of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) on 21st June 2001," Dr Meek said.

"The new system replaced the previous voluntary arrangements that were overseen by the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee and began a new era of transparency and accountability to the Australian public on the regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

"The Act and the OGTR provides the public, farmers, researchers and companies involved in GMOs certainty, consistency and safety for people and the environment."

Dr Meek said she was pleased that the OGTR has delivered on all the key elements of the new legislation.

These include:

- Production of an information-packed website which details the assessment of applications for proposed dealings with GMOs and lists the locations of all field trials of genetically modified crops.
- the holding of the first Ministerial Council on Gene Technology which oversees the implementation of the regulatory system,
- the commencement of work by the Ministerial Council on its first policy principle (to recognise GM/Non-GM designated areas established under State or Territory legislation),
- the establishment of the three committees to advise the Regulator and the Ministerial Council on technical, ethical and community consultation issues;
- the development of a risk assessment and risk management framework to provide assistance to applicants for licences,

- the development of a monitoring and compliance framework to provide guidance to licence holders and other interested parties.
- the implementation of a risk-based monitoring strategy which sees a minimum of 20% of all higher level containment facilities and field trial sites inspected each year

The Commonwealth legislation was developed in close consultation with all State and Territory Governments and all jurisdictions have signed off on the Inter-governmental Agreement that underpins this nationally consistent regulatory system.

"During this year I have received 20 licence applications for intentional releases of GMOs into the environment, the vast majority of which have been for field trials," Dr Meek said.

"I have issued four licences for limited and controlled releases of various forms of genetically modified cotton in Queensland, WA and the Northern Territory and the remainder of the applications are in various stages of the comprehensive assessment process required by the legislation."

Each licence application requires the preparation of a detailed risk assessment and risk management plan and the public is always given the opportunity to comment on the plan (including any proposed licence conditions).

The licence applications currently under consideration include:

- **Cotton:** Five applications for field trials and one application for a commercial release to be carried out in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory
- **Canola:** Two applications for field trials in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, and one application for a commercial release by Monsanto Limited.
- **Oilseed Poppies:** Two applications for field trials in Western Australia and Tasmania.
- **Sugar Cane :** One application for a field trial in Northern Queensland

By the end of June 2002 over a third of approximately 70 applications for licences to conduct work in contained laboratory facilities will have been approved.

Dr Meek said the year ahead posed many challenges, including consultation on revised certifications guidelines for contained facilities and the introduction of cost recovery for the Office, as well as the conversion of interim approvals for activities with GMOs that were underway prior to 21 June 2001 to formal approvals under the new system.

Dr Meek said the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator remained committed to openness and transparency and she encouraged the community to get involved in the public consultation process. Visit www.ogtr.gov.au or ring 1800 181 030 for further information.

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