

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON LICENCE DIR 071/2006 FOR LIMITED AND CONTROLLED RELEASE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED DROUGHT TOLERANT WHEAT

What is this licence for ?

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI Victoria) has obtained approval for a limited and controlled release of up to 30 lines of genetically modified (GM) wheat (*Triticum aestivum*). The trial is authorised to take place at two sites in the local government areas of Horsham and Mildura, Victoria, on a maximum total area of 0.315 hectares over one growing season (May 2007 – March 2008).

How have the GM wheat lines been altered ?

The GM lines proposed for release contain one of six different genes which express proteins that are intended to enable normal plant growth with reduced amounts of water (drought tolerance). The introduced genes were derived from plants (thale cress and corn), a moss and a yeast. The GM wheat lines also contain a herbicide tolerance gene and an antibiotic resistance gene that were used as markers to select for successful genetic modifications during initial research and development work in the laboratory.

What is the purpose of the proposed trial ?

The purpose of the trial is to conduct early stage, ‘proof of concept’ research to assess the effect of the introduced genes on the agronomic performance of the GM wheat lines under rain-fed, drought prone conditions. Some seed will be collected and retained for analysis and possible future trials of lines that may be selected for further development. No GM plant materials from this release will be used in human food or animal feed.

Is this the first GM wheat field trial in Australia ?

No. While these specific GM wheat lines have not been previously released in Australia, two field trials of other GM wheat lines (with altered grain starch and salt tolerance) have been approved under the current legislation, ranging in size from 0.05 to 0.45 hectares. There were also five field trials of GM wheat lines under the former voluntary system dating back to 1996. There have been no reports of adverse effects on human health or the environment resulting from any of these trials.

What feedback did you receive on the consultation RARMP ?

No new risks were identified in the advice received from the wide range of experts, agencies and authorities prescribed in the *Gene Technology Act 2000* for consultation on the preparation of Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plans (RARMPs) for all DIR licence applications. Of the 15 submissions received from the public, six supported the release and seven raised issues that were considered in the risk assessment process. Summaries of these submissions and how and where these issues were considered are provided in Appendix D of the finalised RARMP.

What controls have been applied to this release ?

The finalised RARMP that was prepared for DIR 071/2006 and formed the basis of the Regulator’s decision to issue the licence concluded that the proposed release poses negligible risks to people or the environment. However, a range of licence conditions have been imposed to limit the release to the size, duration and locations requested by DPI Victoria as these were important considerations in the evaluation process. They include measures to restrict the spread of the GMOs and the introduced genes; requiring that transport and storage of the GM plant materials are in accordance with OGTR guidelines; and monitoring for, and destroying, any volunteer plants on the release site for a minimum of 2 years and until the sites are clear for at least 6 months (full details can be found in the licence, see below).

Want more information ?

A number of documents relating to this decision are available on the OGTR website (<<http://www.ogtr.gov.au>> under “What’s new”) or via Freecall 1800 181 030. These documents include the finalised RARMP, an Executive Summary, a Technical Summary and a copy of the full licence.