

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON LICENCE DECISION DIR 081/2007: LIMITED & CONTROLLED RELEASE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED COTTON

What is this licence for?

Monsanto Australia Limited has obtained approval to trial, under limited and controlled conditions, up to 504 cotton lines that have been genetically modified (GM). The release will take place at up to twenty sites in the local government areas (LGAs) in NSW of Balranald, Bourke, Central Darling, Carathool, Coonamble, Gunnedah, Hay, Lachlan, Moree Plains, Narrabri, Narromine, Walgett, Warren and Lake Tandou (an unincorporated area); the Qld LGAs of Paroo, Balonne, Dalby Regional, Goondiwindi Regional, Toowoomba Regional, Somerset Regional, Brisbane City and Lockyer Valley Regional; and the WA LGA of Wyndham-East Kimberly. The field trials will take place on a maximum total area of 80 ha from 2008-10.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The purpose of the trial is to conduct proof of concept research involving experiments to evaluate agronomic characteristics including water use efficiency, yield and fibre quality of the GM cotton lines under optimal and water stress conditions. Promising lines will be selected for propagation for possible future commercial development (which would be subject to separate approvals). None of the GM plant materials from the trial will be permitted to be used in human food or animal feed.

How have the GM cotton lines been modified?

Each cotton line contains one of 50 different genes derived from various plants, bacteria, yeast or fungi. The introduced genes encode proteins that are intended to confer enhanced water use efficiency. Similar proteins occur naturally in a range of organisms, including plants widely consumed by people and animals.

All of the GM cotton lines also contain an antibiotic resistance or herbicide tolerance selectable marker gene, which was used to identify transformed plants during initial development of GM plants in the laboratory. Each of these genes was derived from common bacteria.

Is this the first field trial of these GM cottons in Australia?

Most of the GM cotton lines have not been trialled in Australia. However, a licence has been issued for field trials of GM cotton lines containing seventeen of the same genes (DIR 064/2006).

What controls have been imposed on this release?

The finalised Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (RARMP) that was prepared for this limited and controlled release 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, locations and duration requested by the applicant as these were important considerations in the evaluation process. Control measures to restrict the spread and persistence of the GMOs and the introduced genes include ensuring 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 at least twelve months after final harvest until no volunteers are detected for the last six months of the monitoring period.

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.