

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON LICENCE DECISION DIR 087: LIMITED & CONTROLLED RELEASE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED COTTON**What is this licence for?**

Bayer CropScience Pty Ltd (Bayer) has obtained approval to trial, under limited and controlled conditions, cotton that has been genetically modified (GM) for insect resistance and herbicide tolerance. The release will take place on an area of up to 0.36 ha over the summer cotton growing season 2008–2009, at one site in the New South Wales cotton growing area of Narrabri.

What is the purpose of the trial?

The purpose of the trial is to conduct early stage research to assess the agronomic performance of the GM cotton under natural field conditions, and to assess how effectively the plants resist cotton bollworm. Cotton bollworm is a major agricultural pest in Australian cotton growing regions. None of the GM plant material from the trial will be used in human food or animal feed or for manufacture of any other cotton products.

How has the GM cotton been modified?

The GM cotton contains three introduced genes, all derived from common soil bacteria.

Two of the genes confer insect resistance and they produce proteins that are highly specific and toxic to the caterpillars of some of the major insect pests of cotton.

The GM cotton has also been modified by the introduction of a herbicide tolerance gene. The presence of this gene enables GM cotton plants to be sprayed with herbicides containing glufosinate ammonium to kill weeds without damaging the crop.

Is this the first field trial of this GM cotton in Australia?

There has been no previous release of this cotton in Australia. However, there have been numerous field trials of GM cotton plants containing the herbicide resistance gene and the same or similar genes for insect resistance.

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, location 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 the GM cotton plants in the field are surrounded by a pollen trap and that transport and storage of the GM plant materials are in accordance with OGTR guidelines. The licence also requires monitoring for, and destruction of, any cotton plants on the release site for at least twelve months after final harvest and until no volunteers are detected for a continuous 6 month 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.